

**A SYSTEM OF AGGRESSION: MOTIVES, METHODS AND
MARGINS OF METHODIST GROWTH WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO THE GROWTH OF METHODISM ON
CANNOCK CHASE 1776-1893**

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ABSTRACT

*A System of Aggression; Motives, Methods and Margins
of Methodist Growth with special reference to the growth
of Methodism on Cannock Chase 1777-1893.*

This study treats Methodism as a self-conscious religious phenomenon in its own right and not as the answer to some other related historical problem. The aim of the study is to examine the influence of concepts of ministry and church growth formulated by John Wesley upon the ways in which Methodism approached the task of promoting its own growth.

The analysis of Wesley's concepts of ministry and church growth reveals an unresolved dilemma between the evangelical task of making converts and the pastoral task of providing spiritual nurture for them.

Tracing the development of Methodist revivalism shows how the pastoral task prevailed over the evangelical one to the extent that revivalism became the province of specialised revivalists.

The study of the growth of Methodism on Cannock Chase shows how the trend towards professional revivalists led to the decline of lay participation in promoting the growth and vitality of Methodism. The evangelistic fervour of revival prayer meetings gave way to the excitement of fund raising activities designed to maintain the connexional system.

The religious experience of Methodist converts also changed as the God of Wrath of the early revivalists preying on the residue of the superstitious Roman Catholic religious consciousness gave way to a benevolent God with a liberal attitude towards human shortcomings. This change reflected the change of Methodism from being a revival movement to a national church.

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Chapter One

The Fundamental Problem of Methodist Growth in the light of Historical Debate

1. The fundamental problem of Methodist growth

The fundamental problem of Methodism has to do with the growth of the movement since the outstanding historical feature of Methodism is its phenomenal growth between 1740 and 1840. The one hundred or so members of the first Wesleyan Society in London in 1740¹ had grown to 301,743 in 1840 with the grand aggregate of all the Methodist bodies in the United Kingdom being 478,480.² "There has never been, since the first age of Christianity, " boasted Henry Bett in 1937, "any evangelistic movement so rapid, so widespread, and so colossal in its results. Upon any estimate which accepts the reality of religion at all it is the greatest work of the Spirit of God in the history of the church."³

Robert Currie defined the nature of the problem for those historians who concern themselves with "the whole growth process" rather than with "isolated problems" as being: "Why do Methodist denominations increase and decrease when and where they do?"⁴ His way of answering the problem was to analyze the membership figures of the various Methodist denominations since "A growth study has for its subject-matter quantitative changes occurring in a particular unit or group."⁵ It is undeniable that the growth of any religious movement is a highly visible activity involving increases in the number of church buildings erected, the number of localities served by these premises, the diverse activities associated with the buildings, and in the number of people who service and attend these buildings. This study, however, does not attempt to examine church growth with the quantitative methods employed by the sociologist of religion.

This is not to undervalue the statistics uncovered by sociological quantitative research. For Methodists, as for other religious movements, "totals of practising Christians" have always provided "a measure of changes in the vitality of [their] religion."⁶ John Wesley required circuit plans to carry details of the members in each society, and the number of new members.⁷ He opened the annual Conference of 1777 with an inquiry into the allegations that Methodism was in decline, and based his conclusions on the state of the existing membership - "By this then you may form a sure judgment. Do the Methodists in general decrease in number? Then they decrease in grace; they are a fallen, or at least, a falling people. But they do not decrease in number; they continually increase; therefore they are not a fallen people."⁸ The first recorded annual decrease in membership moved the Wesleyan Conference of 1820 to produce the famous "Liverpool Minutes" with their ringing resolution for every Methodist minister to "consider himself as called to be, in point of enterprise, zeal and diligence, a Home Missionary, and to enlarge and extend, as well as keep, the Circuit to which he is appointed."⁹

In this close relationship between the statistics of church growth and the self-consciousness of Methodism is to be found the approach I have adopted in this study of the growth of Methodism - namely, to quote Arnold Toynbee, that "self-determination is the criterion of growth."¹⁰ Since self-determination is the expression of a distinct sense of identity the fundamental problem of Methodism for this study is what concepts of ministry and church growth did Methodism formulate, and what kind of influence did they have upon how Methodists approached the task of spreading their faith? The growth of Methodism cannot be divorced from the contexts in which it established itself. A further aim of this study, therefore, is to examine the growth of Methodism between 1776-1893 with special reference to Cannock Chase, in Staffordshire, which was one of the marginal

areas of industrial development which are supposed to have been especially favourable for the growth of Methodism. In seeking to understand the growth of Methodism as a subject worthy of study in its right with its own autonomous powers of self-determination this study fits into what Ronald Hutton has described as "a wider historiographical pattern, the current tendency to suspicion of economic and social determinism and a revival of belief in the importance of religious and political factors as forces for change in their own right."¹¹

This study makes four contributions to the understanding Methodist growth: one, it provides a classification of Methodist revival which helps to clarify the diversity of the phenomenon; two, it locates the appeal of Methodism in the manifold forms of the popular religious consciousness of the time - not just in the aims of the principal figures of the movement; three, it highlights the role of spontaneous, public, prayer in promoting the revivals of religion which were a spectacular feature of Methodist growth and which was first singled out for special attention by W.E.Farndale in 1950¹² but neglected by subsequent historians until Deborah Valenze in 1985¹³; and four, it contributes to the historiography of Methodism by providing an account of the growth and development of Methodism in the hitherto neglected region of Cannock Chase in Staffordshire.

The approach adopted to the study of the fundamental problem of Methodist growth has been influenced by theories of Methodist growth advanced by Elie Halévy, his supporters and protagonists, and in opposition to the theory advanced by Robert Currie and his collaborators, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley. The remainder of this chapter, therefore, is devoted to an examination of these theories, and concluded with an outline of the development of the thesis.

2. The Antidote for Revolution

Elie Halévy was not interested in the growth of Methodism as a subject worthy of study in its own right. Instead, he was intrigued by the question of why England was spared the horrors of the kind of revolution which toppled the established order of society in France in 1789. His explanation was that the potential for revolution in England had been defused as early as 1739 when the Methodist Revival coincided with the birth pangs of the Industrial Revolution and served to divert the discontent caused by a severe economic crisis aggravated by a political crisis into the pursuit of popular religion: "It was in the year 1739 that John Wesley and George Whitefield began to preach Methodism. It was a period of general disturbance. A political was aggravated by an economic crisis. On all sides there were strikes and riots. Similar conditions a half-century later must have given rise to a general movement of political and social revolution. In 1739 the revolt assumed a different form. The discontented workmen flocked to sermons of three clergymen and their disciples. The popular ferment took shape as an outburst of enthusiastic Christianity."¹⁴

Halévy was elaborating an argument put forward initially by apologists for Methodism beginning with Dr. Whitehead's funeral sermon over Wesley of which the "main thesis was the steadying effect of loyal Methodist subjects in a politically disturbed society" and continuing through a succession of loyal addresses from Conference to the crown;¹⁵ and endorsed by a succession of influential historians like Robert Southey, W.H. Lecky and J.R. Green in England, and Francois Guizot and Hippolyte Taine in France. The consensus of opinion was that the Methodist Revival gave England the spiritual and moral strength to resist the "fatal allurements of the French Revolution."¹⁶

It is possible to identify three main types of response to Halévy's thesis. Some historians like R.F. Wearmouth and E.P. Thompson accepted it uncritically; others, like

A.D.Gilbert, F.C.Grant, and B.Semmel accepted that Methodism did influence English society but in a different manner to that proposed by Halévy or, like M.Edwards and J.Walsh, not as decisively as claimed by Halévy. Some, like E.J.Hobsbawm and J.Kent, rejected Halévy's thesis as an unnecessary answer to the question of how England escaped a revolution.

Maldwyn Edwards accepted Halévy's thesis that Methodism did influence English society but not in the decisive way he claimed it did. In 1939 Edwards was of the opinion that "Had Wesley never lived, there would have been no revolution in England similar to that in France" because there was no impassable line separating the aristocracy from the commoners in England as in France; constitutional rule had been achieved in England in 1688; the hearty contempt and dislike of the English for the French; and the effectiveness of the counter propaganda and repressive policies of the Government.¹⁷ Nevertheless the political and social influence of Methodism in the industrial areas of England did serve, as Halévy claimed, but at a later date, to deflect political discontent into religious turbulence, to encourage loyalty to the Crown, and to provide a common meeting ground in religious faith between the different classes of English society so effectively during the dangerous decades between 1789 and 1849 that "agitation was considerably lessened and discontent was allayed."¹⁸ In 1945 R.F Wearmouth, unaffected by Edwards' arguments, took the validity of Halévy's thesis as proven: "The steadiness and loyalty of Methodist people in days of riot and revolution saved England from the calamity that fell upon France. Most authorities acknowledge the truth of the claim and there is no need to enlarge upon it."¹⁹

E.J.Hobsbawm, in his article on "Methodism and the Threat of Revolution" published by *History Today* in 1957, examined the distribution of Methodist church attendance as recorded by the Religious Census of 1851, and came to the conclusion that Methodism did

not play a significant part in averting revolution in the crucial decades between 1789 and 1849 because "The strength of Wesleyanism was probably not great enough, and not well enough distributed to affect the situation decisively."²⁰ Revolution did not occur because the revolutionaries "throughout the entire period were inexperienced, unclear in their minds, badly organized, and divided."²¹

In 1974 John Walsh stated that Halévy's thesis had to be taken seriously because it defined and directed the course of the debate on the role of Methodism in the transformation of Britain into an industrial, capitalist based, class conscious society. Nevertheless he did point out that Halévy "exaggerated the impression which Methodism made on the industrial poor in its early years.... it is highly improbable that infant Methodism was strong enough to have much overall effect as an emollient to industrial disturbance, let alone prevent a 'general revolt'."²² In the same year Robert Moore made a detailed study of the social influence of Methodism upon the mining communities at the head of the Deerness valley in County Durham. Although Halévy's thesis formed part of the argument of his book he could introduce it into his study only in a secondary way by claiming that the liberal ethos of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which enabled mine owners and mine workers to pursue antipathetic goals in a mutual spirit of individual restraint, tolerance and cooperativeness was due to the revived puritanism of the Methodist Revival.²³ In other words Methodism encouraged a deferential attitude towards authority. In 1974 Bernard Semmel, taking up in his own way an argument put forward by William J. Warner in 1930, identified the non-violent revolution by which Methodism saved England from a violent secular revolution as a 'democratic revolution' brought about by Wesleyan doctrine that was essentially liberal and democratic. Where Warner claimed that Methodism failed to translate its liberal ethic "into anything more than personal and

ameliorative activity",²⁴ Semmel argued that the "autonomous conscience and liberal ideals" engendered within its converts provided people and values which were "a strong support of a society which, almost uniquely, sought to extend liberty, and was able to enjoy that liberty because it had mastered, again almost uniquely, a large measure of self-discipline."²⁵

In 1976 A. D. Gilbert was dismissive of Halévy's thesis. In his book "Religion and Society in Industrial Britain" he saw Methodism as the product of the emerging industrial society, and in no position to mobilize its resources in any particular direction.²⁶ The following year F.C. Grant drew attention to the element of moderated, radical protest within Wesleyan Methodism in his paper on "The Revolution in Religious Rhetoric" published in 1977. Methodist preaching encouraged the formation of a primitive language of social protest so that "The act of going to hear the Methodist preacher was a protest against the status quo."²⁷ This anticipated A.D. Gilbert's change of heart in 1980. Methodism did help to maintain public order and social order, but not in the conservative, reactionary way described by Halévy. In 1886 J.H. Overton described the way Methodism had diverted the political grievances of the articulate working class into "a far more noble subject - the love of God" as "a sort of safety-valve through which many let off superfluous steam."²⁸ Gilbert used the simile to make the opposite point that Methodism provided a 'moderate radicalism' in which social protest was made without feeling the need to resort to violent, unconstitutional means. Methodism provided a 'safety-valve' - especially in areas of the country where tendencies towards political disorder actually existed.²⁹

In 1981 John Walsh elaborated on this point about Halévy's thesis in the light of criticisms that Methodism could not be considered the friend of the working classes because it pre-empted the time, talents and money of would be revolutionaries; helped to create the

new, self-disciplined industrial personality required for the development of industrial capitalism; and discouraged radical political opinions among its members. In reply Walsh claimed that Halévy and others had overrated the Methodist presence in the life of the nation. There were only 150,000 Methodists (all told) out of a population of 10 million in 1811, and worshipping Methodists composed only 4% of the national population in 1851. The professional ministry was too small, and moved too often to effectively impose Conference rulings against radical political opinions among the Methodist members. Rural chapels offered a legal opportunity to criticise or to shun the Established Church and the squirearchy. Primitive Methodism provided both a model for working-class led organizations, and a cadre of working-class leaders, that enabled the working class to move away from the anarchic pre-industrial forms of dispute towards the more disciplined, organized modern forms of class warfare.³⁰

In 1981 John Kent dismissed the extent of Methodist influence upon national life as negligible. He accused Halévy of introducing a "superfluous miracle" for there was "no intense revolutionary pressure" in England following the American War of Independence. The ruling class was strong enough to cope with popular unrest by the use of force - especially after its "slow but total victory over Napoleon." It was "the willingness of owners to starve out strikers" and "the government's well timed displays of force" which preserved stability in the older mining areas where Methodism was more in force than in the industrial towns during the 1840s.³¹

The debate between the advocates, the revisers, and the rejecters of Halevy's thesis is unresolved. Yet there does seem to be some common ground between the revisionists and the sceptics. They agree that revolution did not occur because the people did not want one

and the revolutionaries were incapable of inciting one; and that the influence of Methodism on English society must not be exaggerated.

3. Cycles of Prosperity

The growth of Methodism was not steady and uniform. Instead it progressed in a very uneven way with marked periods of rapid growth followed by equally dramatic periods of declining growth. If Alan Gilbert's figure of 4% annual growth rate is accepted as being above the average annual growth rate then there were thirty-eight years of outstanding growth between 1767 and 1876 interspersed with thirty-seven years when growth was less than 2%p.a.³² Revivals were also a feature of the local growth of Methodism and could reoccur more than once in the same locality. The city of Sheffield was "undeviatingly revival-minded" according to Richard Carwardine, who pointed out that there was "a marked revival" in every decade between 1790 and 1844.³³ Seth Evans, the historian of Wesleyan Methodism in New Mills, Cheshire, stated that "There have been times of extraordinary quickening in New Mills, particularly in the years 1840, 1848, 1862, 1870 and 1890. The two years, 1839-40, of the ministry of Thomas Owen Keysell, have been termed the golden age of New Mills Methodism."³⁴ The discussion of the nature of religious revival in the rest of this chapter will veer between revival understood as a general trend and revival as a local event.

Wesley, and succeeding generations of Methodists, were content to accept these irregular and unpredictable occurrences of revival as part of the unfathomable mystery of God's providential way of working in the world to hasten the coming of His Kingdom. In 1783 Wesley, taking assurance from the fact that the Methodist revival had already lasted for over fifty years from its first beginnings at Oxford in 1729, robustly rebutted the predictions of critics of the revival that it would collapse on his death by affirming, "I

cannot induce myself to think that God has wrought so glorious a work to let it sink and die away in a few years. No; I trust this is only the beginning of a far greater work - the dawn of 'the latter day glory'." ³⁵ Even when millenarian expectations had subsided, F.W. Bourne, the historian of the Bible Christians, was still content to accept as late as 1904 that, "No complete explanation of these ebbs and flows can be given [for they] are among the secret things which the Father has kept in His own power." ³⁶

Modern social historians are more concerned with finding the general economic and sociological factors which influence church growth and revivals. For an historian like Alan Gilbert "Religious revivals are social phenomena with social antecedents." ³⁷ Accordingly Gilbert joined forces with Robert Currie and Lee Horsley to explain the constantly recurring character of revivals by linking them to a constant underlying material factor. They postulate "a five-phase cycle which explains general fluctuations in church membership: depression, activation, revival, deactivation and declension. Revival follows a period of activation within the Church itself which is marked by renewed zeal and commitment and by subsequent rise in expectations of church growth as enthusiasm becomes externalized and recruitment rates climb." ³⁸

The consistent material factor which determines the cycle of membership fluctuation is the constituency of the church - the "cohesive section of the population which is significantly disposed towards church membership." ³⁹ Because any body of Christians, irrespective of size of membership, share the same membership characteristics - a core of active, committed members surrounded by a body of adherents of varying degrees of involvement which compose the constituency from which it draws its members - Currie, Gilbert and Horsley have been able to use the word "Church" to denote the whole body of Christian members within a nation, a region, and a locality to produce a simple but

comprehensive model of church growth. Gilbert's independent study of Methodist and Nonconformist growth at the national level revealed a growth pattern consisting of a succession of short-term cycles with peaks and troughs demonstrating that "the success of the English churches in maintaining or improving their quantitative position within the wider society was due, not to consistent recruitment at levels to offset inevitable losses, but to sporadic periods of extremely heavy recruitment which compensated for longer intervening phases of virtual stagnation or actual decline."⁴⁰ At the regional level David Luker's study of revivalism in Cornwall found "A cyclical process... apparent in most Cornish revivals with peaks of membership at the time of revival preceded by usually lengthy periods of steady growth and followed by fairly rapid declension. In 1799, five years of gradual consolidation preceded a dramatic year in which membership was doubled in two west Cornwall circuits, with over 4000 new members brought in. By 1803, however, the gains had largely been surrendered."⁴¹

From a statistical point of view Currie, Gilbert, and Horsley's model makes it possible to define a revival as a period of dramatic growth in membership followed by an equally dramatic decrease which leaves the membership at a slightly higher level than it was before the revival. This kind of pattern in the membership returns of an individual Methodist Society or Circuit can provide evidence of a revival where other written records are lacking or not obvious. However, as a general theoretical model to explain or to predict church growth the theory proposed by Currie, Gilbert and Horsley does suffer from three defects.

In the first place there is the logical objection to the structure of the concept itself, namely, that there is no necessary connection between any of the phases within the cycle of church growth as proposed by Currie and his colleagues:

A heightened sense of expectation for an increase in the number of church members does not always lead to a revival. In 1868 Peter McKenzie was appointed to the Sans Street Wesleyan Methodist circuit in Sunderland. The Superintendent minister was Thomas Vasey who had just come from Newcastle where he had had a very successful ministry. McKenzie had enjoyed great success at Gateshead. "The distance between Newcastle and Gateshead and Sunderland is only 12 miles; the people were of a similar type, and were kind and helpful; the ministers who had worked so prosperously in the former places were working here in the same spirit, and yet there was not the same success.." McKenzie added 70 new members in his first two years of his ministry, but there was a decrease of 21 in his third year.⁴²

Revival can take place without overt activation. Sometimes there are people waiting but not overtly working for a revival and are activated by externally supplied leadership. J.F.Wedley, the historian of the Wesleyan Stourport circuit, says of the society at Highley: "In 1833 the membership had risen to 22. From this date, up to 1842, the cause seems to have lost some of its spirituality, and there are some now alive who remember the coldness and indifference which seems to have taken hold upon the society... During the ministry of the Revds William Woolsey, Simeon Noall, and John Sanders, a most gracious revival sprang up... The lukewarm became once more earnest; backsliders were reclaimed, and sinners converted to God."⁴³

Sometimes declension and depression go hand in hand without any periods of growth and revival. At Wilden on the Stourport circuit services were first held there for the two years between 1825 and 1827. They were resumed for another four years between 1830 and 1834. There was a further sequence of services for the sixteen years between 1841 and

1857. Another sequence of services was discontinued in 1865, and the last series of services took place between 1873 and 1875.⁴⁴

Revival does not always immediately end in declension. In 1821 John James found the Wesleyan Halifax Circuit "in a state of comparative depression" but "during his three years in this Circuit, the societies increased from eleven hundred and forty to sixteen hundred members; and since that time the cause has been gradually improving until now [1834], when a second chapel is added to our previously large establishment; and the members upon the ground then occupied, are double to what he found."⁴⁵ The Minehead Wesleyan Circuit was formed out of the Taunton Circuit in 1811. For the first thirteen years of its existence the circuit had a precarious life with its second minister being withdrawn in 1819. The appointment of John Henley in 1824 coincided with a revival in Taunton which Henley helped to spread to the part of West Somerset covered by his circuit. From that time the work of the circuit was strengthened and consolidated.⁴⁶

In the second place there is the objection that Currie, Gilbert and Horsley's theory lacks subtlety and imagination because they ignore the limitations inherent in using statistical models as comprehensive explanations and predictions of natural phenomena due to the contradictions and paradoxes within the models themselves.⁴⁷ In the third place there is the related objection that in offering one general static explanation of an historical process which by its nature is subject to change, the nature of history is distorted by offering a mechanism of change in which patterns of behaviour repeat themselves without variation. Currie, Gilbert and Horsley are aware of this weakness in their theory for when they are discussing the turning points of the peaks and troughs of the growth rates in church membership they admit that judging these turning points is complicated by the imperfections of the data available, and by the unique historical circumstances of each

period involving those different combinations of internal and external circumstances which give history its distinctive character, and which are the particular province of the historian.

The key element in Currie, Gilbert and Horsley's concept of the circular nature of revival is the local community of religiously inclined people with similar beliefs and practices who provide the local church with its "constituency" of potential members. The central thesis of Currie and his collaborators is that church growth is dependent on this constituency which itself is subject to external, secularising changes in society which gradually destroys its religious beliefs and practices, thus making its religious allegiance to its local church unnecessary.⁴⁸

John Wesley was not indifferent to the influence of external circumstances on religious belief. In his sermon on "The Late Work of God in North America" published in 1778, he traced the economic effects of the War of Independence upon the American colonies. He attributed the initial prosperity of the war followed by a prolonged period of poverty and hardship to the providential work of God designed to punish the Americans for their disobedience to the English crown, and to create in them the state of mind necessary to receive the preaching of the gospel. "He punishes that he may amend" wrote Wesley; "that he may first make them sensible of their sins, which anyone that has eyes to see may read in their punishment; and then to bring them back to the spirit of their forefathers, the spirit of humility, temperance, industry, chastity; yea, and a general willingness to hear and receive the word which is able to save their souls."⁴⁹

Wesley derived his philosophy of providential history from the covenant faith of the Old Testament where the history of Israel was interpreted as a succession of divine deliverances from enemies who oppressed them, followed by periods of declension and apostasy which were punished by God to bring the Israelites back to repentance and

obedience. A philosophy of history expounded most notably in Psalm 106, and summarised in Nehemiah 9, 26-28. For Wesley and his fellow evangelicals, therefore, a period of religious decline was always a call for renewed effort to create a climate of religious expectancy for the next period of revival. The faithful core of believers in each locality were summoned to express their contrition for the local indifference to religion in local days of public fasting, and to express their aspirations for revival in public days of intercessory prayer.⁵⁰

4. The propensity towards instability

Because of its importance to this study the most interesting development of Elie Halévy's thesis must be regarded as the one made in 1963 by E.P. Thompson in his book, *The Making of the English Working Class*. Thompson accepted Halévy's thesis but gave it a psychological interpretation in terms of the working class experience of Methodist conversion. Along with political repression and the influence of middle class reformers who persuaded the masses to follow constitutional remedies, Methodism played its part in preventing possible revolution in 1819 and 1832 by diverting the revolutionary impulses of the working classes into religion. The converted labouring class were induced to accept the work discipline of the factory on the emotional religious grounds that, "since joy was associated with sin and guilt, and pain (Christ's wounds) with goodness and love.... it became natural to suppose that man or child only found grace in God's eyes when performing laborious or self-denying tasks." For Thompson the Methodist experience of conversion became "a form of psychic exploitation."⁵¹

In his criticism of Thompson's thesis made in 1978, John Kent thought it unlikely that the kind of conversion experience described by Thompson ever took place. He can find no evidence that "conversion is tied to any particular social behaviour."⁵² He doubted whether

the number of Methodists present in the industrial factory areas of Britain was large enough to make any appreciable difference to the work discipline imposed by the factory masters which relied upon blacklists of awkward workers, corporal punishment of the children, fines, threats of dismissal, and incentive payments.⁵³ In any case Methodist workmen were never the industrial serfs Thompson made them out to have been. Joseph Ritson, in the course of extolling the Primitive Methodist contribution to the leadership of Trade Unions, had to explain away the violence associated with the miners' strikes at Earsden in County Durham in 1844, which were led by Primitive Methodist local preachers, by saying that the accusations of violence and lawlessness were "a gross libel" levelled at the men by biased pit owners.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, Thompson did try to understand Methodism in its own terms by concentrating on the Methodist experience of conversion, even though his attempt to do so was distorted by his Marxist ideology "that since religious belief is essentially irrational then religion must always be explained in terms of displacement and repression."⁵⁵ When Thompson looked at the jagged, serrated graph of Methodist growth he saw it in a more dynamic, imaginatively historical way than did Currie, Gilbert and Horsley. To Thompson the graph was "a revivalist pulsation, or an oscillation between periods of hope and periods of despair and spiritual anguish."⁵⁶ The peak years of Methodist growth in 1797-1800, 1805-1807, 1813-1818, 1823-1824 were the periods when "religious revivalism took over just at the point where 'political' or temporal aspirations met with defeat."⁵⁷ He did add that, "To take it further, we should know more about, not the years of revivalism, but the months; not the counties but the towns and the villages."⁵⁸

Those who have taken their studies further in the way he suggested have not found the conclusive evidence to support his thesis. John Baxter studied the Great West Yorkshire

Revival of 1792-1796 and found that "with the onset of repression came revival"; but the period of preparation for the revival by its leaders (William Bramwell and Ann Cutler who were hardly influenced by political motives or circumstances) coincided with the period of radical excitement, and the outbreak of revival coincided with the outbreak of loyalist fervour. Thompson probably exaggerated the size of the radical constituency.⁵⁹ J.S. Werner also studied the Great West Yorkshire Revival of 1792-1796 and came to the conclusion that the link between radicalism and revivalism was obscure since "the economic, political, and emotional climate of the period was congenial to both movements."⁶⁰ Robert Colls studied the Primitive Methodist revivals of the Northern Coalfield between 1820 and 1840 and concluded that the volatile character of Methodist membership was not to be explained in simple terms of "working class political aspirations, their defeat, and reactive revivalism." He found that "Chartism and the N.M.A. grew as Primitive Methodists grew - and in 1832 and 1844 Primitive Methodism fell as unions fell."⁶¹ Richard Carwardine studied the northern revival campaigns of James Caughey between 1842 and 1848 and came to the conclusion that Thompson's hypothesis "does not work" even though Caughey's campaigns "took place during the lull between the peaks of Chartist activity in 1842 and 1848." The Wesleyans "experienced their greatest increase in membership during the entire decade from 1834-1844. Moreover, the great majority of Caughey's converts were in regular church membership or attendance and outside the group most susceptible to Chartist persuasions."⁶²

In the postscript to the 1968 [Pelican] edition of his book Thompson expressed his alarm at the danger of having his tentative suggestion elevated to the status of a thesis for: "Revivalism is not a phenomenon which admits of a single hold-all explanation. Given the initial propensity to instability it may be set in motion by any sombre or dramatic event - a

Lisbon earthquake, plague, famine, national crisis, war, a local pit-disaster, or (in a village) the sudden death of an individual. It may be induced by missionary activity from outside, or within a church, there may be periodic self-induced revivals, following an internal generational pattern, as successive cohorts of young are brought to an emotional commitment to the church of their parents."⁶³ Here is that emphasis on the particular and the personal which is necessarily absent from the theory of Currie, Gilbert, and Horsley and which makes it an unsatisfactory historical explanation of revival.

The study of individual revivals may require the investigation of the particular circumstances listed by Thompson but the underlying propensity towards instability taken for granted by Thompson does point the way towards a comprehensive explanation for the persistence of revivalism throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thompson, looking for the problem that religious belief was supposed to solve, found the propensity towards instability in the political despair of the working class. As Baxter, Colls, and Carwardine suggest, he identified the wrong problem, and exaggerated the size of the constituency to which the problem he had identified applied. M.I. Thomis and P. Holt are nearer to the mind of the nineteenth-century working class than Thompson was when they affirm that the reason "revolution did not occur in the period 1787-1848 must be attributed primarily to the absence of any popular desire for revolution." Although Methodism provided working class leaders who exerted their influence in non-revolutionary ways, the working classes, themselves, continued to think "in terms of race and religion rather than of class," and "their grievances remained immediate [food, wages, unpopular recruiting methods, conditions of service and so on] and able to be satisfied without the need for fundamental change within the social and political system."⁶⁴

of the working class popular folk religion. Phythian Adams identifies three major concerns of popular attitudes during "much of the first half of the nineteenth century": the correct observance of even the most mundane of established practices; the use of divination to come to terms with whatever fate was decreed for the hapless individual; and the attribution of dire, unanticipated misfortune to the malevolent activity of witches. The mental attitudes involved in these concerns he says, were "At root... understandably obsessed with accounting for and meeting the omnipresent threats of destitution or dearth, disease and death."⁶⁵

Of the more influential studies of the relationship between Methodism and popular folk beliefs James Obelkevich's regional study of religion in South Lindsey (Lincolnshire) between 1825 and 1875 concentrated on "the broad spectrum of local religious phenomena" which he extended to include popular superstition. His aim was "to place this multifarious religious life in its changing social context."⁶⁶ The value of Obelkevich's contribution was, as John Vickers pointed out in his review of the book, to highlight for future discussion, "an aspect of the religious spectrum which [was] all too often overlooked or too hastily dismissed."⁶⁷ David Clark, in his local study of religion in the Yorkshire fishing village of Staithes, came to the important conclusion that the evangelical zeal of the Methodists eventually succumbed to the entrenched forces of popular religion which it had sought to transform and to supplant.⁶⁸ John Rule's study of Methodism and the popular beliefs and culture of Cornish villages between 1800 and 1850 argued that "Methodism did not so much replace folk-beliefs as translate them into a religious idiom...In modern British history no church of comparable weight has allowed a greater degree of comprehensiveness or frequency to divine or satanic intervention than did early Methodism. The idea of an omnipotent deity and a malicious devil can explain singularity of misfortune as well as can

omnipotent deity and a malicious devil can explain singularity of misfortune as well as can witches or evil spirits. The retributive anger of God can explain the most widespread of disaster.⁶⁹

It is the close relationship between Methodism and popular folk religion and culture that explains the background to the Methodist revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. E.P.Thompson's historical imagination was quite right to interpret the rapid oscillations of the graph of Methodist growth as the feverish pulsations of a disturbed national consciousness. "There was an edge to life in the eighteenth century " says J.H.Plumb, "which it is difficult for us to recapture. In every class there is the same taut neurotic quality - the fantastic gambling and drinking, the riots, brutality and violence, and everywhere and always a constant sense of death."⁷⁰ The natural reaction of people living in such a constant neurotic frame of mind with the kind of popular religious culture that they had was to express their terrors of real or imagined dangers in times of national or local crises in superstitious religious terms. Thus, when, in July 1783 the town of Witney in Oxfordshire was enveloped in the second ferocious thunderstorm it had experienced within two successive days, many of the inhabitants who thought the day of judgment was come flocked out of their houses into the streets to kneel and pray for deliverance. Huge crowds attended a prayer meeting in the local methodist chapel, and filled the parish church on the Sunday morning.⁷¹

The Methodist preaching which was designed "to produce in the breasts of those who heard [it], a crisis of despair followed by a sudden relaxation and a mood of blissful peace"⁷² was admirably suited to exploit this kind of superstitious religious sensibility in circumstances of heightened fears. Just how dramatic events could become within such an atmosphere is provided by the experience of John Cennick while preaching on the

forgiveness of sins at an evening meeting in the schoolroom at Kingswood: "It was pitch dark.... large flashes of lightning and loud claps of thunder mixed with the screams of frightened parents and the exclamations of nine distressed souls!... many [raved] up and down, and crying, 'The devil will have me! I am his servant! I am damned! my sins can never be pardoned! I am gone for ever!...' One cried out, 'That fearful thunder is raised by the devil; in this storm he will bear me to hell.'"⁷³

5.Summary

This study agrees with those scholars who reject Halévy's thesis on the grounds that revolution did not occur in England because the people did not want one, the revolutionaries were incapable of inciting one, and the Methodist presence was not strong enough to exert a decisive influence on English society. Nevertheless, E.P.Thompson's emphasis on the psychological appeal of Methodism to the working class drew attention to the neurotic character of the national consciousness in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This made it possible to take seriously the work of Methodist scholars who have examined the inter-active relationship between Methodism and popular folk religion which expressed itself most dramatically in the outbreak of religious revivals. These periodic outbreaks cannot be satisfactorily explained in the criteria of the cyclical theory proposed by Currie, Gilbert and Horsley since it lacks historical imagination in seeking to explain a complex phenomena with one static model. The approach adopted in this study is to view Methodism as a religious movement with its own distinctive sense of identity and self-determination.

John Wesley's influence in shaping this distinctive sense of identity is the subject of the second chapter. The development of this sense of identity and the changes it underwent are dealt with in the third chapter. Chapters four to seven are a case study of the growth of

Methodism on Cannock Chase. The eighth chapter examines the relationship between Methodism and the popular religious consciousness in order to offer an explanation for the phenomenal growth of Methodism.

Endnotes

1. G.J.Stevenson, *City Road Chapel London and its Associations: Historical, Biographical, and Memorial* (1872), 12
- 2.. R.Currie, A.Gilbert, L.Horsley, *Churches and Church-Goers. Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (1977), 140
- 3.H.Bett, *The Spirit of Methodism* (1949), 8
- 4.R.Currie, "A Micro-Theory of Methodist Growth" in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Volume XXXVI, Part 3 (1967), 65
5. Ibid., 66
- 6.D.Hervieu-Leger, "Signs of a Contemporary Religious Revival" in *Consilium*, Volume 9, No.9 (1973), 12
- 7.J.Telford, editor, *The Letters of John Wesley*, Volume XII (1931), 45 & 103
- 8.quoted in Davies, George and Rupp, editors, *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Volume 4 (1986), 103.
- 9.H.W.Williams, *The Constitution and Polity of Wesleyan Methodism* (1880), 304
- 10.A.Toynbee, *The Study of History* (edited by D.C.Somervell, 1948), 209
- 11.R.Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England. The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (1994), 262
12. W.E.Farndale, *The Secret of Mow Cop: A New Appraisal of Primitive Methodist Origins* (1950), 9 & 68-71
13. D.M.Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (1985), 50-73
14. E.Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, Volume 1: England in 1815 (1949), 389. This eloquent paragraph summarizes the full description given of the crises referred to, and of the birth of Methodism, in Halévy's essays on *The Birth of Methodism in England* (translated by Bernard Semmel, Chicago, 1971), 62-77
- 15.M.Edwards, *This Methodism: Eight Studies* (1939), 48-49
- 16.B.Semmel, "The Halévy Thesis: Methodism and Revolution" in *Encounter* (July 1971), 49-50
17. Edwards, *This Methodism*, 35-50
18. M.Edwards, *Methodism and England 1850-1932* (1944), 46-48
- 19.R.F.Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Common People of the Eighteenth Century* (1945), 265. [C.M.Jones also accepted the Halévy thesis uncritically in *Perfectionist Persuasion: The Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1867-1936* (Scarecrow 1974), 1]
- 20.E.J.Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men* (1968), 34
- 21 Ibid., 24
- 22.John Walsh, "Elie Halévy and The Birth of Methodism" in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 25 (1975), 19-20. This essay was an elaboration of a point he had made about the importance of Halévy's essays on the origin of Methodism in his paper on "The Origins of the Evangelical Revival" in G.V.Bennett & J.D.Walsh, editors, *Essays in Modern English Church History* (1966), 132.
- 23.R.W.Moore, *Pulpits, Preachers and Politics* (1974), 6-7
- 24.W.J.Warner, *The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution* (1930), 19-20
- 25.B.Semmel, *The Methodist Revolution* (1974), 198. Semmel loses credibility with his quixotic argument that: "The leaders of Methodism after Wesley's death...seeing the connection divided between the rich and poor, and hoping to separate the Methodist poor from the forces threatening social revolution," diverted Methodist energies to overseas missions." (144-145) A contemporary historian like Abel Stevens, however, saw the development of Overseas Missions as the logical culmination of a religious movement that had attained organic unity and a settled polity. [Abel Stevens, *The History of Methodism*, Volume 1 (1865), i]

26. A.D.Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914* (1976), 114
27. F.C.Grant, "The Revolution in Religious Rhetoric: John Wesley and the Evangelical Impact in England" in *The Historian* (1977), 452
28. J.H.Overton, *The Evangelical Revival in the Eighteenth Century* (1886), 141--142
29. A.D.Gilbert, "Methodism, Dissent and Political Stability in Early Industrial England " in *Journal of Religious History* (1980), 381-399
- 30.J. Walsh, "Methodism and the Common People" in R.Samuel, editor, *Peoples' History and Socialist Theory* (1981), J.L. and B. Hammond in *The Town Labourer* (1917. pb 1966), 256-273) argued that although Methodism discouraged or hindered the working class movement for industrial and political reform by preaching "Toryism in its official declarations and a pietism that thought only of the next world" nevertheless it also served as "an admirable school for democrats" by "equipping men for popular leadership" through creating democratic chapel communities.
- 31.J. Kent, "Methodism and Social Change in Britain" in T.Runyon, editor, *Sanctification and Liberation* (Abingdon, 1981), 83-86.
32. The years of outstanding growth were 1769, 1770-1771, 1774-1775, 1778-1779, 1784-1788, 1791, 1793, 1794-1797, 1804-1816, 1821-1822, 1833-1834, 1840, 1859-1860, and 1876. The years of low growth were 1772, 1781, 1783, 1817-1820, 1825-1826, 1829-1831, 1835-1838, 1841-1856, and 1862-1875..Currie et al., *Churches and Churchgoers*, Table 2.5, 40
- 33.R.Carwardine, *Trans-atlantic Revivalism: 1790-1865* (1978), 115
- 34.S.Evans, *New Mills Methodism* (1912), 68
35. Sermon 63, "The General Spread of the Gospel" in *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 2, Sermons II, 34-70. edited by A.C.Outler (Abingdon, 1986), 493. Jonathan Edwards saw the revival taking place in America in general, and in New England in particular, as "the beginning or forerunner of something greater." The general evangelical consensus of opinion that the revivals of religion taking place in the British Isles and in North America were signs of the dawning of the millennium provided the common ground for the "Concert of Prayer" formed in 1744 to pray for the revival of religion to hasten the coming of God's Kingdom. [R.B.Steele, 'Gracious Affection' and 'True Virtue' According to Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley (Scarecrow Press, 1994), 150]
36. F.W.Bourne, *The Bible Christians: Their Origins and History*, Part VI (September 1904), 331
37. A.Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, 193
38. D.Luker, "Revivalism in Theory and Practice: The case of Cornish Methodism" in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*. Volume XXXVII (1988), 611
- 39.Currie et al., *Churches and Churchgoers*, 54
- 40.Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, 192
- 41.Luker, "Revivalism in Theory and Practice...", 611
42. J.Dawson, *Peter McKenzie: His Life and Labours* (1897), 168
43. J.F.Wedley, *A History of Methodism in the Stourport Circuit: 1781-1899* (1899), 69
44. Ibid., 94-95
45. *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* 1834, 12
46. A.G.Pointon, *Methodists in West Somerset: The story of the West Somerset Circuit 1790-1980* (1982), 31
47. On this point compare the observation of S.W.Hawking [in *A Brief History of Time* (1988), 11] "It turns out to be very difficult to devise a theory that will describe the universe all in one go. Instead we break the problem up into bits and invent a number of partial theories." He then goes on to point out the paradox that although the general theory of relativity describes the large scale structure of the universe, and that quantum mechanics deals with phenomena on extremely small scale the two theories "are known to be inconsistent with each other - they cannot both be correct."
- 48.This summary drawn from the review of *Churches and Churchgoers* by Duane McDonald in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Volume XLI, Part 5 (1978), 161. For the harmful effects of a change in its constituency on a local church see E.R.Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City* (1957), 168-169 [Park Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Sheffield] and J.Dawson, *Peter McKenzie: His Life and Labours* (1899), 192 [St.Peter's Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Leeds]
- 49.Sermon 113, "The Late Work of God in North America" in *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 3, Sermons III, 71-114, edited by A.C.Outler (Abingdon, 1986), 607
50. for the influence of this attitude of mind in preparing a climate of opinion for revival see J.B.Boles, *The Great Revival 1787-1805* (University of Kentucky Press, 1972), 25-35 and W.R.Cross, *The Burned-over*

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51. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Pelican 1968), 944
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54. J. Ritson, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism* (1909), 281
55. D. Hempton, "Motives, Methods, and Margins in Methodism's Age of Expansion" in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Volume 49, Part 6 (1994), 192
56. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 427
57. Ibid., 419
58. Ibid., 429
59. J. Baxter, "The Great Yorkshire Revival 1792-1796: A Study of Mass Revival Among the Methodists" in *Sociological Yearbook of Religion* Number 7 (1974), 166
60. J.S. Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History* (Wisconsin 1984), 44
61. R. Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield: Work, Culture and Protest 1790-1850* (1987), 166
62. Carwardine, *Trans-atlantic Revivalism*, 117
63. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 919
64. M.I. Thomis and P. Holt, *Threats of Revolution in Britain* (1977), 128
65. C. Phythian Adams, "Rural Culture" in G.E. Mingay, editor, *The Victorian Countryside*, Volume 2 (1981), 620
66. J. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-1875* (1976), vii.
67. *The Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Volume XLI, Part 3 (1977), 87
68. D. Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew* (1982)
69. J. Rule, "Methodism, Popular Beliefs and Village Culture in Cornwall, 1800-1850" in Robert D. Storch, editor, *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth Century England* (1982), 64. [John Wesley "was persuaded" by the events of his narrow escape from death when the two horses drawing the chaise he was travelling in with his step-daughter and her two children bolted out of control that "both evil and good angels had a large share in the transaction." T. Jackson, editor, *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume IV (1865), 19]
70. J.H. Plumb, *England in the Eighteenth Century* (1950), 95
71. Jackson, *Works*, Volume IV, 247
72. Halévy, *Birth of Methodism*, 37
73. quoted Frederick Hockin, *John Wesley and Modern Methodism* (1887), 143-144

Chapter Two

John Wesley's Concepts of Revival and Revivalism

1736-1768

1. Introduction

"Revival" used in a religious sense can denote either a long term movement of religious growth and renewal or a short-lived local period of intense religious excitement marked by a concentration of conversions.¹ The word is used in both senses in this study. A preacher who generated revivals was known as a "revivalist", and his approach to his work of generating revivals was known as "revivalism."² This chapter, therefore, is about John Wesley's understanding of revival, and of the approaches he adopted and advocated for encouraging revivals to occur.

Both Methodist and non-Methodist historians alike have neglected Wesley's views on the nature of revival and revivalism. Alan Gilbert quoted part of one of Wesley's descriptions of the nature of a revival, but only to illustrate the point that the essence of Methodist success lay in the revival of neglected "grand truths" like justification by faith.³ Henry Rack was content to point out that John Wesley drew the distinction between revival as a long term movement of growth and as a short-lived local event.⁴ The general neglect may be due to the unexpressed assumption that Wesley had nothing original to say about either revival or revivalism. R.B.Steele seems to stand alone as one scholar who has contributed a specialised study to Wesley's concepts of revival and revivalism. Even Steele, in his paper on "John Wesley's synthesis of the revival practices of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Nicholas von Zinzendorf",⁵ argued that, "Wesley drew so much from so many

different sources that he cannot be said to have called any man father. His eclecticism was his originality. His methodology of revival was a hybrid, a synthesis of many divergent approaches that was nevertheless greater than the sum of its constituent parts."⁶

R.B. Steele was able to arrive at this conclusion only by totally disregarding Wesley's High Church heritage derived from his father, and Wesley's experience of religious revival as a child at Epworth, as a don at Oxford, and as a missionary in Georgia. One of the aims of this chapter is to demonstrate that it is the man Wesley called "father" who was the formative role model for Wesley's concept of revivalism, and that Wesley's revivalism was essentially the High Church ministry of his father (at Epworth and Wroote in Lincolnshire), creatively adapted and modified by Wesley to the needs of the Wesleyan Methodist revival, and in line with Wesley's own mature ambition to be a "Primitive Christian" conforming to the practices and doctrines of the first five Christian centuries. The main aims of the chapter are to describe Wesley's concepts of revival and revivalism, and to expose the unresolved dilemma of ministry and church growth at the heart of Wesley's concept of revivalism.

2. John Wesley's Concept of Revival

John Wesley described revival as a limited period of dramatic interest in religion within a community followed by an equally dramatic decline: "Everywhere the work of God rises higher and higher, till it comes to a point. Here it seems for a short time to be at a stay; and then it gradually sinks again."⁷

Wesley ascribed revival to the unpredictable work of God's Holy Spirit exploiting human curiosity: "At first, curiosity brings many hearers; at the same time, God draws many by his preventing grace to hear his word, and comforts them in hearing. One then tells another. By this means, on the one hand, curiosity spreads and increases; and, on the

other, the drawings of God's Spirit touches more hearts, and many of them more powerfully than before." Interest in religion reaches its height in the conversion of many of the people affected by the preaching of the gospel, "But it cannot stay here, in the nature of things. Curiosity must soon decline."

The decline of a revival, according to Wesley, was followed by bitterness and acrimony: "Men, once curious to hear, will hear no more; men, once drawn, having stifled their good desires, will disapprove what they approved of before... and feel dislike instead of good-will to the preachers. Others who were more or less convinced will be afraid or ashamed to acknowledge that conviction; and all these will catch at ill stories, true or false, in order to justify their charge. When, by that means, all who do not savingly believe have quenched the Spirit of God, the little flock that remain go on from faith to faith; the rest sleep and take their rest; thus the number of hearers in every place may be expected, first to increase, and then to decrease."⁸

In the light of Wesley's description a revival can be defined as a short term dramatic increase in the membership of a local church or churches followed by an equally dramatic decrease in membership set within the context of a dramatic rise and fall of religious interest and excitement shown by the local community. According to Wesley revival falls into three distinct phases. People are: *drawn by the Spirit* to hear the preacher either out of curiosity or by the sincere desire to seek salvation, *driven by the Spirit* to obtain salvation, *deserted by the Spirit* in protest at the insincerity of people and their unwillingness to respond to His prompting in a proper manner.

These three phases were apparent in the revival that took place among the leadminers of Upper Weardale in County Durham between June 1772 and June 1774.

Drawn by the Spirit: the arousal of religious excitement. There is some confusion about the origins of Methodism at Weardale. Wesley reckoned it was introduced by John Brown and Christopher Hopper in 1749 and consolidated by the work of Jacob Rowell and another young preacher in the winter of that year.⁹ Local tradition claimed that John Brown founded the first society in 1746, and that Christopher Hopper consolidated his work in the winter of 1748.¹⁰ In 1763 there was a revival of religion under the ministry of George Storey which doubled the number of the thirty-six members.¹¹ A renewed, increased interest in religion was shown between June to the end of November 1772. The Methodists at Weardale were a tightly knit community. They intermarried and encouraged their children to seek conversion. The leaders "were upright men, and truly alive to God. And even when they had no Preacher with them, they met every night for singing and prayer."¹²

Driven by the Spirit: the climax of religious hysteria. The revival broke out on the afternoon of Sunday December 1, 1772 under the preaching of William Hunter, a local preacher: "Many, being cut to the heart, cried aloud for mercy; and ten were added to the society." There were excited prayer meetings on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings. The excitement reached its height at the Saturday night prayer meeting which began at six o'clock. The voice of the third prayer leader, "could not be heard for the cries of the people." The prayer leaders "endeavored to break up the meeting at ten but the people would not go" so the meeting continued till midnight. "During this meeting, eleven persons found peace with God." On Sunday morning the prayer meeting began at the usual time, but again the voices of the three leaders were "drowned by the thanksgiving of the new converts, and the cries of convinced sinners."¹³

Reports of the revival spread through the neighbourhood so quickly that when another meeting commenced at two o'clock on the same Sunday, "an abundance of people came

from various parts, being alarmed by some confused reports. We sung and prayed; and the power of God descended. A young man, who had been deeply wounded in the morning, now found One mighty to heal. We then concluded; but many of the people came in again, and others stayed at the door. Among those who came in was one who had been remarkably profligate. He cried for mercy with all his might. Several crowded about to see him; and before we parted, not only he, but five more, were rejoicing and praising God together.."14

This description of the height of the revival at Weardale reveals the basic indiscipline which was the typical feature of Methodist revivals. There was vocal disorder with individual people disturbing the meetings and interrupting either the preachers or the prayer leaders with either loud cries of distress or loud cries of praise celebrating their deliverance from the agonies of their fear of damnation; and the noise of praying groups of people around those showing signs of spiritual distress. There was physical disorder with people falling down in a trance or dead faint - one young man "lay as one dead"; violent convulsions; agitated behaviour as they prayed for mercy with converts running ecstatically around the congregation to exhort and to pray with the unconverted. There was the general helplessness of the preachers or prayer leaders to exert any kind of discipline over the general bedlam of the revival.

Jacob Rowell, one of the travelling preachers, arrived on Tuesday December 10, stayed three days, and joined many new members of whom "three and thirty...had found peace with God, as did five more in the week following." James Watson, the other travelling preacher, in the course of his round, "joined many more, eleven were justified."¹⁵ In June 1773 John Fenwick informed John Wesley that: "The society now consists of a hundred and sixty-five members, of whom there are but twenty that have not found peace with

God... Forty-three of these are children, thirty of whom are rejoicing in the love of God. The chief instrument God has used among these is Jane Salkeld, a young woman, a school mistress, who is a pattern to all that believe."¹⁶

Deserted by the Spirit: the subsidence of religious excitement. When Wesley arrived at Weardale on Saturday June 11, 1774 he found a "grievous decay in the vast work of God, which was here two years since." He attributed the causes of this decline to: the pastoral incompetence of the Travelling Preachers, the marriage of Jane Salkeld which deprived the children of her leadership, the diversion of the energies of the young male and female converts into courtship of one another, dissension within the society over the efficacy of conversion and sanctification, and the inevitable bad feeling engendered by a revival leading to the discouragement of both Preachers and people.¹⁷

The Methodist connexional system of travelling gospel preachers was ideal for maintaining the momentum of revival as a movement of long term growth through promoting a continuous series of short-lived local revivals. The acts and noise of shouting, sobbing, and groaning of revival meetings were, says Donald Manning, "at the core" of the Methodist movement. Through the testimony, song, shout and laughter of the revival meeting the interior life of individuals was fused together into a community of shared experience. "The preaching of early Methodism, therefore, - the sound of the Holy Spirit - was at the heart of Methodist ideology precisely because it made the gospel an event."¹⁸

The connexional system of travelling gospel preachers was unsuitable for nourishing the spiritual life of that faithful core of believers -the "little flock" - that remained when the excitement of revival had subsided. Wesley, however, came to his understanding of revival through his experiences of an Anglican parish ministry, and this sequence in the

development of his concepts of revival and revivalism was to create an unresolved dilemma for his preachers as will be shown in the rest of this chapter.

3. John Wesley's Concept of High Church Revivalism.

John Wesley's concepts of revivalism were formed from his father's ministry at Epworth, his further studies of Primitive Christianity at Oxford, and his experience as a missionary in Georgia and as an itinerant evangelist in London, Oxford and Bristol.

Wesley was a High Churchman and the son of a High Churchman. His father Samuel Wesley was one of those parish clergymen who was caught up in the late seventeenth century High Church movement for the renewal the Church of England, the reformation of English society, and the conversion of the heathen. This revival was inspired in part by what John Walsh calls, "a remarkable cult of Christian primitivism which, in a quiet way, constituted a virtual religious revival affecting many aspects of its life."¹⁹ As a High Churchman Samuel Wesley was a member of a group of clergymen and laymen who, according to John Walsh, were "self-conscious conservatives" turning back to Christian tradition to defend apostolicity, episcopacy, liturgy, the eucharistic sacrifice, and the "religious character of magistracy; divine right, passive obedience." An ethic of charity inherited from the Middle Ages and reinforced by patristic learning stressed the obligations of Christian stewardship towards poverty and wealth.²⁰ Concern for the reformation of society, for education, and for the conversion of the heathen were expressed in the foundation of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, and the Propagation of the Christian Gospel to Foreign Parts.

Samuel Wesley saw himself, therefore, as a guardian of the apostolic order and doctrine, and became involved in the work of reformation and renewal. He preached on

behalf of the Society for the Reformation of Manners at Westminster in 1699 but failed in his attempt to found a branch of the society in his parish. The distinguishing features of his parish ministry were, firstly, a clear, intense pattern of public religious services. At Epworth he held two services every Sunday, administered the Holy Communion monthly, and held daily prayers twice a week, and on feast days. This was complemented by regular religious instruction through house to house visitation, the catechism of children during Lent, and the provision of a library; the encouragement of spiritual development by forming a Religious Society of some twenty-eight men on Dr Horneck's model for prayer, reading, edifying conversation and the doing of acts of charity; and by strict discipline.²¹ He welcomed James Oglethorpe's scheme to found a colony in Georgia for debtors, and even considered going there as a missionary despite his advanced age.²² John Wesley imbibed his father's High Churchmanship,²³ and fulfilled his father's ambition to be a missionary by going out to Georgia as a missionary with the S.P.G. on October 19, 1735.

Once he was in Georgia, John Wesley exercised a parish ministry which bore the basic features of his father's ministry modified by his own distinctive style of zealous High Churchmanship. The clear pattern of public worship was intensified with three services on a Sunday and daily prayers every day of the week. There was regular religious instruction from house to house but the young were educated by his friend Charles Delamotte during the week and catechized by Wesley on a Sunday. Encouragement of spiritual development was extended to women by forming religious societies for their benefit. The reformation of manners was promoted by fearless private and public reproof: "He championed the cause of those whom he deemed wrongly accused and unjustly treated by the magistrates; he opposed licentiousness, blasphemy, drunkenness, slavery, and every violation of the laws of God and man."²⁴ Strict discipline was enforced in matters relating to baptism and

the administration of Holy Communion. Only communicants were allowed to sponsor babies for baptism. Communicants had to give prior notice of their intention to attend the Sacrament. People who had been irregularly baptized were not given the sacrament.²⁵

While at Oxford Wesley had been influenced by John Clayton of Brasenose College, who was associated with a group of Non-Jurors in Manchester, to extend his interest in primitive Christianity to the liturgical practices of the early church. Georgia gave Wesley the opportunity to practise a primitive Christian ministry. He divided the Sunday services into morning prayer, communion and sermon, and evening prayer; he stood to pray on Sundays; faced east at the recitation of the creed; mingled water with wine at the Holy Communion; immersed those babies strong enough to take the shock at baptism; prayed for the faithful departed; enjoined fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays; and commended confession and penance as Christian duties.²⁶

Wesley's ministry in Georgia lasted for nearly nineteenth months from February 2, 1736 to December 2, 1737. The animosity aroused among the colonists by his High Church discipline, his unfortunate courtship with Sophy Hopkins, his flight back to England and his agonised soul searching all combine to create the impression that his ministry in Georgia was a failure. R.D.Urlin's verdict was that Wesley "accomplished little."²⁷ A.C.Outler's verdict is that, "The Methodist mission to Georgia was a fiasco."²⁸ R.B.Steele describes the venture as "a complete failure."²⁹ This was not Wesley's considered judgment upon his labours in Georgia. In his sermon on "The Late Work of God in North America" published in 1778, he stated that a revival broke out in 1736 in the south among the German speaking colonists of Georgia and among the English speaking colonists at Savannah and Frederica concurrently with a revival in the north at Northampton in New England under the ministry of Jonathan Edwards. The two revivals

spread towards each other through the middle colonies. George Whitefield inherited this revival on his arrival in the colonies in 1738 "and by his ministry a line of communication was formed, quite from Georgia to New England."³⁰

It is ironic that it is only now that historians are taking seriously Wesley's evaluation of Whitefield as, to quote Marilyn Westerkamp, "a catalyst rather than an instigator of revival" - as being "part of a larger movement, rather than as the final cause of the awakening."³¹ Wesley's claim to have seen an awakening under his ministry in Georgia gains in credibility when it is seen to have been the model for his concept of the nature of a revival. Wesley's ministry in Georgia fits into his pattern of arousal, increase and decline of interest. Furthermore Wesley's bitter experiences in Georgia seem to have coloured his description of the decline of a revival.³²

The first stage - arousal - began on Sunday March 7, 1736 when Wesley preached his first sermon in the wooden storehouse next to the larger courthouse and parsonage. There was a large, attentive but doubtless curious, congregation present to see the new preacher from England.³³ There was another large congregation at Frederica when Wesley preached there on Sunday April 11.³⁴ A sign of the growing revival was Wesley's advice in mid-April to the "more serious among" his congregation to form themselves into "a sort of little society, and to meet once or twice a week, in order to instruct, exhort, and reprove one another." Out of this society Wesley chose an elite few to meet him as a group in the parsonage on a Sunday, and as individuals during the week.³⁵

The growing momentum of the second stage of the revival necessitated a move to the courthouse for public services on Sunday May 9. From Monday May 10 Wesley began to visit his parishioners from house to house between the hours of 12 noon and 3 p.m. while they were forced to rest because of the heat. His labours bore fruit for when Charles

Wesley exchanged charges with his brother in mid-April he found himself addressing 100 hearers at the week day services.³⁶ The work at Frederica revived with John's arrival. On May 23 there were nineteen people present at the morning service, with nine communicants. The following Sunday there were only five at the morning service but twenty five at the afternoon one. A small society was also formed.³⁷ The society at Savannah "had settled into a regular pattern" by February 1737. There were meetings with Wesley after evening prayers on Wednesday and Saturday, and on Sunday afternoons.³⁸ Wesley's work at Savannah also "increased more and more, particularly on the Lord's day." This was because Wesley, in the best tradition of Anglican parochial ministry, treated his parishioners impartially. He used his gifts for languages to the full by conducting prayers in Italian at 9 a.m. and French at 1 p.m. He conducted prayers in German at Frederica, and he also began to learn Spanish in order to minister to the Jewish community in Savannah.³⁹ He paid visits to the smaller hamlets at Highgate, Hampstead, Thunderbolt and Skidoway.⁴⁰ By the time Charles left the colony on August 11, 1736 the number of communicants had risen from an original three to forty.⁴¹

Wesley's plain, pointed, persuasive preaching which "endeavored to convince of unbelief, by simply proposing the conditions of salvation as they are laid down in scripture; and appealing to their own hearts, whether they believed they could be saved on no other terms"⁴² reinforced by his sincerity, goodness and kindness, began to bear fruit. The women heeded his admonitions to put aside their fashionable gowns and turned up for Sunday worship more modestly attired. A ball arranged to compete with one of his evening services "was deserted while the church was full."⁴³ A revival among the children at Savannah in June 1737 marked the end of the revival for interest among the adults had been declining some months previously.⁴⁴ This was especially true of Frederica where the public

prayer services were discontinued as early as October 1736. The religious society had ceased to meet by January 1737.⁴⁵

The revival's decline, which was characterized by acrimony, began on Sunday July 3, 1737 with Wesley's decision to reprove Sophy Williamson for unseemly behaviour. On Sunday August 7 he excluded her from Holy Communion. By September 30 Wesley was bewailing "the poison of infidelity, which was now with great industry propagated among us." On Friday December 2, 1737 "finding there was no possibility" of fulfilling his original mission "of preaching to the Indians" he left Georgia for Charlestown and a passage home to England.⁴⁶

What emerges from these early years of his ministry is that John Wesley was a High Churchman with the desire to make his churchmanship correspond as closely as possible to the doctrine and practice of the early church of the first five centuries. He viewed revival as steady, assured growth in genuine Christian holiness. He looked for revival to be the product of: plain, pointed, persuasive scriptural preaching; a clearly defined pattern of intense, public religious worship enforced with strict discipline; meeting in fellowship with groups of like-minded Christians for mutual reproof, instruction and exhortation; regular instruction in scriptural Christianity from house to house, the catechizing of children, and the provision of good Christian literature; the reformation of public manners and acts of charity.

4. John Wesley's Concept of Charismatic Revivalism

Revival followed Wesley home from Georgia. Between his landing in England on February 1, 1738 and his departure for Herrnhut on June 13, 1738 Wesley lost no opportunity in preaching wherever he could find an audience: parish churches, inns, stables, private houses, prisons, on horseback to fellow travellers he met along his way⁴⁷

This intemperate eagerness to witness to the Gospel whenever and wherever he could might have been the expression of what he regarded as an extraordinary call to abandon a regular parish ministry in order to look upon the whole world as his parish.⁴⁸ A call that was given depth and confidence by his experience at Aldersgate on May 24, 1738 and confirmed by the revival that began on his return from Herrnhut on Saturday September 16, 1738. The following day he "began again to declare... the glad tidings of salvation, preaching three times and afterwards expounding the Holy Scripture to a large company", possibly some two hundred or so people, in a butcher's shop in the Minories in London.⁴⁹ On October 14, 1738 he jubilantly informed John de Koker of Rotterdam that "both in London and Oxford... there is a general awakening, and multitudes are crying out, 'What must I do to be saved?'"⁵⁰ On October 30 he informed Count Zinzendorf that, "The word of the Lord runs and is glorified, and his work goes on and prospers. Great multitudes are every where awakened..⁵¹

Wesley's life was a busy round of preaching in churches, prisons, workhouses, and the private rooms of the religious societies to be found in London and Oxford. An idea of how full his days were can be gathered from a letter he wrote to George Whitefield on February 26, 1739: *Sunday* - preached at the churches of St. Katherine-near-the-Tower and at Islington; and to religious societies meeting at Mr.Sims, Mr. Bells, Mr.Brays, and at Fetter Lane. *Monday evening* - Skinner's at 4.00, Mrs.West's at 6.00, Gravel-lane (Bishopgate) at 8.00, and Mr. Crouch of St.James's Square. *Wednesday* - "at 6 ... a noble Company of Women, not adorned with Gold or Costly Apparel, but with a Meek and Quiet Spirit, & Good Works." *Thursday* - Mrs. Sims and the Savoy. *Friday* - Mr.Abbot's and Mr.Parker's.

By the early months of 1739 the revival was in full flow with the fields after the service at Islington on February 26 "white with people praising God." There were "About 300 present at Mr. Sims" on the same day. "A large Company of poor Sinners" met at Bishopsgate on a Monday. On a Thursday evening at the Savoy there were "usually 2 or 300."⁵² At this time Wesley, as Henry Rack observes, "was moving in a highly-charged charismatic atmosphere in which he thought he saw the scenes of the Acts of the Apostles reproduced with all the strange gifts of the apostolic age repeated: not only instant conversions but visions, demon possession and healing."⁵³

A new dimension was added to the charismatic character of the revival with sporadic incidents of hysterical behaviour (ie. deep, disturbed emotions expressing themselves through exaggerated physical activities) from the beginning of 1739. On January 1 during a love-feast at Fetter Lane attended by some sixty people: "About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we had recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of his majesty, we broke out with one voice, 'We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.'"¹¹⁷ On Sunday January 21, while Wesley was expounding in the Minories, "A well-dressed middle-aged woman cried out as in the agonies of death. She continued so to do for some time, with all the signs of the sharpest anguish of spirit."⁵⁵ At Oxford, while praying with a woman on her own in her house, "she fell into an extreme agony both of body and soul, and soon after cried out with the utmost earnestness, 'Now I know, I am forgiven for Christ's sake.'"⁵⁶ The following evening Wesley met her again with a number of her neighbours. One of these "felt as it were the piercing of a sword" and in the street outside

the house "could not avoid crying out aloud." Wesley no longer maintained a detached attitude with such sufferers but began to pray for her relief together with her companions.⁵⁷

On March 3, 1739 George Whitefield wrote to Wesley from Bristol informing him of " a glorious door opened among the colliers. You must come and water what God has enabled me to plant." A reluctant Wesley was prodded for a decision in a further letter on March 22: "If the brethren after prayer for direction think proper, I wish you would be here the latter end of next week."⁵⁸ Whitefield's invitations caused consternation among Wesley's circle of friends in London. They had " an unaccountable fear that it would prove fatal to him." Lots drawn to decide the issue decreed that Wesley go to Bristol. The ever loyal Charles Wesley caught up in the drama "desired to die with him."⁵⁹ On his arrival at Bristol Wesley wrote to his brother Samuel: "I do not now expect to see your face in the flesh. Not that I believe God will discharge you yet; but I believe I have nearly finished my course."⁶⁰ Wesley, therefore, arrived and preached in Bristol in a state of intense excitement. His agitation matched the mood of the city which was in a state of social turbulence and transition due to its development as an industrial and commercial centre and port.

The population was growing rapidly. Colonial trade in bulk goods like sugar, tobacco, and iron ore was creating mercantile credit that was being invested in developing industries like coalmining, and the manufacture of glass and porcelain. A network of turnpiked roads constructed between 1721 and 1730 enabled travellers like John Wesley to travel relatively quickly from London to Bristol via Reading; and made it possible for Wesley to make frequent excursions to Bath and Gloucester while he was at Bristol.⁶¹ The excitement engendered by the rapid industrial expansion of the city and of its economic hinterland was aggravated by popular social unrest. Corn riots among the miners at nearby Kingswood

were a cause of great anxiety to the inhabitants of Bristol. The religious temperature of the city was raised by the activity of the "French Prophets" with their claims to being able to perform miracles; and to receiving divine revelations in dreams and visions accompanied by physical convulsions.⁶²

Wesley's excitement reached a climax on the morning of Thursday April 26 at Newgate Prison. While preaching on the words, "He that believeth hath everlasting life" Wesley was led, without any previous design, "to speak strongly and explicitly of Predestination, and then to pray 'that if I spake not the truth of God, He would not delay to confirm it by signs following.'" In spontaneously calling upon God to vindicate the Gospel of Free Grace with the instant public conviction and conversion of sinners, John Wesley the Popular Revivalist was born. The proper little clergyman arrayed in his gown and bands⁶³ who had been, until just prior to his arrival in Bristol, "so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order" that he "should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church",⁶⁴ was now casting all his inhibitions aside, and calling publicly and fervently upon God to convict and to convert his hearers: "Immediately the power of God fell upon us: one, and another, and another sunk to the earth: you might see them dropping on all sides as thunder-struck. One cried out aloud. I went and prayed over her, and she received joy in the Holy Ghost. A second falling into the same agony, we turned to her, and received for her also the promise of the Father. In the evening I made the same appeal to God, and almost before we called He answered. A young woman was seized with such pangs as I never saw before; and in a quarter of an hour she had a new song in her mouth, a thanksgiving unto our God."⁶⁵

In these events at Bristol on the morning and evening of April 26 are present four features that would become characteristic of Wesley's charismatic revivalism. The first is a

form of preaching aimed at creating an emotional crisis of repentance and rebirth in his hearers. Jonathan Edwards' account of the revival at Northampton had demonstrated to Wesley that the instantaneous conversion he had experienced as a private individual could be repeated on a larger, more public scale: and that it could be brought about by preaching consisting of what listener of Wesley's sermons described as "a combination of terror and tenderness."⁶⁶ Wesley admitted that his preaching was designed to drive people into what his critics called "a species of madness" and which he termed "repentance and conversion."⁶⁷ He defended his method by saying, "may not love itself constrain us to lay before men 'the terrors of the Lord'? And is it not better that sinners should be terrified now than they should sleep on and awake in hell? I have known exceeding happy results of this even upon men of strong understanding."⁶⁸

The second feature is his use of prayer to reinforce his appeals for instantaneous conversion. Henry Moore recalled of the aged Wesley: "Sometimes when he had liberty his words literally struggled for utterance and he poured them out with great rapidity and force, often stopping for a moment to breathe out a most impressive prayer that the people might there and then believe, and the word have an entrance to them."⁶⁹ Wesley also went among those labouring under a conviction of sin to pray with them in order to help them to overcome their shame, fear and indecision.

A third characteristic is his toleration of bizarre, hysterical behavior. Thomas Maxfield sunk down as though he were dead "but soon began to roar out, and beat himself as one dead, so that six men could scarcely hold him." An awed Wesley recorded: "I never saw one so torn of the evil one."⁷⁰ There was an element present at the meetings which feigned this violent crisis of conversion either to draw attention to themselves or to indulge in drunken horseplay.

Charles Wesley was always willing to eject any imposters who disturbed his meetings in these ways. At Pelton on June 4, 1743 he left a drunkard come straight from the ale-house to thresh about on the floor and to beat himself heartily without anyone praying over him; and a girl suffering from violent convulsions who was carried out of the room and placed on the floor outside the door at once recovered the use of her limbs.⁷¹ John Wesley was quite prepared to accept that "in some few cases, there was a mixture of dissimulation - that persons pretended to see or feel what they did not, and imitated the cries and convulsive motions of those who were really overpowered by the Spirit of God; yet even this should not make us either deny or undervalue the real work of the Spirit."⁷²

The fourth feature is his recourse to field preaching with the occasional spectacular crowd numbering hundreds or thousands backed up by regular meetings for exhortation and prayer in numerous private homes. The evening meeting at Nicholas-street in Bristol on May 21, 1739 must have been the first Methodist "Ranter" prayer-meeting for: "all the house (and indeed all the street for some space) was in uproar. But we continued in prayer; and before ten the greater part had found peace."⁷³ It was destined to set the pattern for a movement of popular, cottage based, prayer-meeting revivalism led by laymen independently of the authority of Wesley and his preachers that would prove to be a disruptive force within the Wesleyan Methodist movement and lead to a number of secessions from the Connexion in the years following Wesley's death.

5. John Wesley's Synthesis of High Church and Charismatic Revivalism

John Wesley still remained a High Churchman at heart when he became a charismatic revivalist and the leader of the Wesleyan Methodist movement. His basic concerns were still "the renewal of ancient Christian morality and spirituality and for church structures and institutions patterned after those of the ancient church."⁷⁴ Methodism was raised up by

God "to reform the nation, particularly the Church: and to spread scriptural holiness over the land."⁷⁵ Albert Outler is right to say of John Wesley that "despite his gifts as leader and organizer, it was his impression that he had never planned the Methodist Revival. He had instead been gathered up into it and swept along by what seemed to him the clear leadings of divine providence."⁷⁶ Wesley informed Vincent Perronet that he and Charles "had no previous design or plan at all; but everything arose just as the occasion offered."⁷⁷ Nevertheless, what Wesley did was to adopt for Methodist use a succession of practices which reflected those of the Primitive Church - field preaching, class-meetings, class tickets, love feasts, watch night services;⁷⁸ and especially the connexional principle of itinerating preachers linking together independent societies under the supervision of John Wesley as their "Father in the Gospel" which reflected the organization of the Pauline churches of the New Testament.⁷⁹

The years between 1757 and 1762 were decisive for the growth of Methodism as a national movement. They were years of unprecedented growth marked by numerous revivals throughout England and Ireland. At the close of 1763 Wesley wrote: "Here I stood and looked back on the late occurrences. Before Thomas Walsh left England God had begun that great work which he has continued ever since without any considerable intermission. During that whole time many have been convinced of sin, many justified, and many backsliders healed."⁸⁰ In 1765 the first public record of the Conference Minutes showed 25 circuits and 71 preachers in England, 4 circuits and 4 preachers in Scotland, 2 circuits and 2 preachers in Wales, and 8 circuits and 15 preachers in Ireland. In 1767 there were 22,410 members in England, 2,801 in Ireland, 468 in Scotland, and 232 in Wales.⁸¹

In 1768 Wesley noted that "in many places the work of God seems to stand still" and went on to ask, "What can be done to revive and enlarge it?" To answer his question

Wesley went back to the High Church ministry he had exercised in Georgia. The recommendations he made for his preachers to follow are a synthesis of the High Church revivalism he practised in Georgia and the charismatic revivalism he had practised in the British Isles since his return in 1738 with the pattern of his revivalism in Georgia providing the basic framework into which he could fit his charismatic revivalism. Wesley looked for Methodist revival to be the product of: in the first place, plain, pointed, emotionally charged, extempore scriptural preaching of the vital necessity of Christian holiness for salvation implemented by fervent prayers for the conversion of the hearers; secondly, the rigorous observance of the Methodist pattern of public religious services - especially field preaching, the 5 a.m. preaching service, the fervent singing of hymns, and the diligent observation of both the Friday and quarterly fast days; thirdly, the core of "believers in any place" meeting in bands for intimate fellowship where they could "speak without reserve"; fourthly, regular religious instruction from house to house, spending "an hour a week with the children in every large town," and the dissemination of Methodist literature; fifthly, by being "conscientiously exact in the Methodist discipline" - especially in the regular appointment of new society stewards who were responsible for distributing charity to the poor and needy; and sixthly, continued union with the Church of England.⁸²

Wesley's call for continued union with the Church of England was an unconvincing attempt to preserve the myth of Methodism as a renewal movement within the Established Church. This was made all the more unconvincing by Wesley's high-handed departures from the standard practice of the Church - preaching in other men's parishes without their permission, extempore prayer, and the holding of annual conferences at which lay preachers were given their stations for the year - and by his failure to form an alliance of

Evangelical clergymen. Wesley's synthesis of 1768 was his recognition that Methodism was now a strong and independent religious body with a need for regular pastoral ministry. In 1769 he acknowledged that his efforts to unite his like-minded brethren in the Church of England had been a failure and turned his attention to strengthening the union between the Methodist societies and preachers.⁸³

Wesley's synthesis, however, created a dilemma which can be seen in his revised version of his twelfth rule for a Helper made in 1780 which closed with the admonition: "It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care merely of this or that society, but to save as many souls as you can: to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance: and with all your power, to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord. And remember, a Methodist Preacher is to mind every point, great and small, in Methodist Discipline."⁸⁴ The dilemma was how to unite effectively in one ministry the twofold task of being an itinerant evangelist serving a religious movement which understood itself as "a great agency for the converting of the souls of men",⁸⁵ and of being a Pastor committed to serving a religious movement developing into a Church seeking not only the salvation of its individual members but also providing a more comprehensive range of religious services to the nation. This dilemma was expressed in William Shrewsbury's description of the Wesleyan Methodist ministry as *An Evangelistical Pastorate*. "The Wesleyan Ministry" wrote Shrewsbury in 1839, "is very much of a mixed kind, for in it there is a blending of the duties of an Evangelist with the office of a pastor so that it may perhaps be not unappropriately denominated a Evangelistical Pastorate."⁸⁶

It was a dilemma that Wesleyan Methodism never resolved satisfactorily, and led to a perpetual conflict between those who accepted Wesley's High Church concept of revivalism and those who championed Wesley's concept of Charismatic revivalism,

concepts which Wesley himself viewed as complementary rather than antithetical. The course of this conflict as it expressed itself in changing concepts of revivalism is the theme of the next chapter.

Endnotes

1. H.D.Rack. *Reasonable Enthusiast. John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (1989), 159. Rack goes on to say that local revivals take place "in a single community of christians who [are] already christians in an evangelical sense." This is not necessarily so for the miners at Kingswood, near Bristol in 1739 were Christians in a nominal sense only before the methodist revival inspired by the preaching of Whitefield and Wesley.
2. There is a tendency by recent Evangelical scholars like Iain Murray and Ian S. Rennie to define "revivalism" derogatorily as "organized evangelism" to distinguish it from genuine, unpredictable, revivals which are inspired by the Holy Ghost without human initiative and management. Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism. The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858* (1994), xix & Ian S. Rennie, "Fundamentalism and the Varieties of North Atlantic Evangelicalism" in Noll, Bebbington, Rawlyk. *Evangelicalism. Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, The British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990* (1994), 335
3. A.Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England. Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914* (1976), 71
4. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 159
5. *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Volume 30, Number 1 (Wilmore, 1995), 154-172
6. Ibid., 171
7. "Short History of the People Called Methodists." T.Jackson, editor, *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume XIII (1865), 320
8. Ibid., 320-321
9. Jackson, *Works*, Volume III, 352
10. *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* 1863, 43 ["H.K.", "The Coming of Methodism to Weardale" in the *Methodist Recorder Winter Number 1898*, 31 gives the credit to Christopher Hopper over Brown.]
11. T.Jackson, editor, *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers*, Volume V (1866), 239
12. Jackson, *Works*, Volume XIII, 37
13. Ibid., 353
14. Ibid., 354
15. Ibid., 354
16. Ibid., 355
17. Jackson, *Works*, Volume IV, 17-18
18. D.G.Matthews, "Evangelical America - The Methodist Ideology" in Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, editors, *Perspectives on American Methodism. Interpretive Essays* (Abingdon, 1993), 19-20
19. J.Walsh, "John Wesley and the Community of Goods" in Keith Robbins, editor, *Protestant Evangelicalism; Britain, Ireland, Germany, and America*. (1990), 28. See T.A.Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity. Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Abingdon, 1991), 7-21 for a review of these studies.
20. Walsh, "John Wesley and the Community of Goods", 32.
21. H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast. John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (1989), 53
22. J.S.Simon, *John Wesley and the Religious Societies* (1921), 111
23. The Moravian, Spangenberg reported of Wesley that he had "several quite special principles, which he still holds strongly, since he drank them in with his mother's milk. He thinks that an ordination not performed by a bishop in the apostolic succession is invalid... All these doctrines derive from the view of the episcopacy which is held in the Papist and English churches and which rests upon the authority of the Fathers. Above all he believes that all references in Scripture of doubtful interpretation must be decided not by reason, but from the writings of the first three centuries..." quoted Campbell, *Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 34-35
24. Simon, *John Wesley and the Religious Societies*, 159

25. M.Lelievre, *John Wesley. His Life and Work*, (1900), 72-73
26. Campbell, *Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 30-31
27. R.D.Urlin, *The Churchman's Life of Wesley* (new edition, 1886), 30
28. A.C.Outler, editor, *John Wesley* (1964), 10
29. R.B.Steele, "Gracious Affection" and "True Virtue" According to Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley (Scarecrow, 1994), 127
30. A.C.Outler, editor, *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 3, Sermons III, 71-114 (Abingdon 1986), 596-597
31. M.J.Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity. Scots -Irish piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760* (New York: 1988), 187 [see H.S.Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Eerdmans, 1991), 93 who describes Whitefield as "the catalyst" for the work of revivalists like Frelinghusen, Dickenson, Rowlands and the Tennents in Philadelphia.]
32. "I could hardly believe that... the far greater part of this attentive, serious people would hereafter trample under foot that word, and say all manner of evil falsely of him that spake it." Jackson, *Works*, Volume 1, 26
33. Jackson, *Works*, Volume 1, 26 (& Volume XIII, 289)
34. Ibid., 28
35. Ibid., 29 (& Volume XIII, 289). R.P.Heitzenrater, [*John Wesley and the People called Methodists*, (Abingdon, 1995), 63] says that the religious society had been formed by Robert Hows, the parish clerk, in 1735 prior to Wesley's arrival, and that Wesley was not actively involved with the society until September 1736.
36. T.Jackson, editor, *The Journal of Charles Wesley*, Volume 1, (1849 reprinted 1980), 27
37. Jackson, *Works*, Volume I, 30-31
38. R.P.Heitzenrater, *John Wesley and the People called Methodists* (Abingdon, 1995), 66
39. Jackson, *Works*, Volume XIII, 290
40. Jackson, *Works*, Volume I, 29 & 38
41. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 118
42. Jackson, *Works*, Volume I, 28
43. Lelievre, *John Wesley*, 72-73
44. Jackson, *Works*, Volume I, 48
45. Heitzenrater, *The People Called Methodists*, 66
46. Jackson, *Works*, Volume XIII, 290
47. Jackson, *Works*, Volume I, sample entries for 02/01/38 (inn at Deal), 02/12/38 (St.Andrew's, Holborn, London), 02/18/38 (Castle prison, Oxford), 03/13/38 (on the coach to Salisbury), 03/15/38 (inns at Shipston & Hednesford, private house at Stafford),
48. "I look upon the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare, unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation." W.R.Ward & R.P.Heitzenrater, *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 19, Journal and Diaries II 1738-1743 (Abingdon, 1990), 67 & Telford, *Letters*, Volume 1, 282. The respondent was formerly believed to have been James Hervey but now, with the discovery of that letter, believed to be John Clayton,. Outler, *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 1, Sermons I, 1-33, (Abingdon, 1984), 13, fn.47.
49. Ward & Heitzenrater, *Works*, Volume 19, 12 & fn.33
50. Telford, *Letters*, Volume 1, 262
51. ibid, 265
52. *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Volume XXXIV, Part 4 (1963), 76-77 .A corrupt version of the text of this letter is found in Telford, *Letters*, Volume I, 280-281
53. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 187. Examples in Ward & Heitzenrater, *Works*, Volume 19, instant conversions (09/30/38 & 10/09/38), visions (11/19/38), demon possession (12/05/38), healing (01/09/38)
54. Ward & Heitzenrater, *Works*, Volume 19, 29
55. Ibid., 32
56. Ibid., 35
57. Ibid., 36. The first, spontaneous example of what Methodists later called "praying companies"
58. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 190
59. Jackson, *Journal of Charles Wesley*, Volume I, 146.
60. Telford, *Letters*, Volume I, 291. The dreadful irony was that Samuel was to die in November 1739.
61. Taken from scattered references in P.Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People* (1989) & B.Trinder. *The Making of the Industrial Landscape* (1987)

62. E.Halevy, *The Birth of Methodism in England* (translated by B.Semmel, Chicago, 1971), 67
63. "Wesley preached in gown and cassock even in the open air." [J.Telford. *The Life of John Wesley* (1886), 317]
64. Jackson, *Works*, Volume I, 174
65. Ibid., 174
66. R.P.Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, Volume I, (Abingdon 1984), 83
- 67.G.R.Cragg, *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 11, The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters (1975), 196
- 68.Telford, *Letters*, Volume II, 69
69. *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1897, 515
70. Jackson, *Works*, Volume I, 185.
- 71.Jackson, *Journal of Charles Wesley*, Volume I, 314. Charles Wesley was sceptical about the majority of the violent convulsions brought on under the influence of his and his brother's peaching. He was pleased to record that he had detected many counterfeits, including Jenny Deschamps, " a girl of twelve years old at Bristol who confessed that the thirty or more fits and cryings out were all feigned that Mr. Wesley might take notice of her." D.M.Jones, *Charles Wesley:A Study* (n.d.), 111
- 72.quoted by W.L.Doughty, *John Wesley: Preacher*, (1955), 133.
- 73.Jackson, *Works*, Volume I, 185
74. Campbell, *Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 52-53.
75. "Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others from the year 1744, to the year 1789." Jackson, *Works*, Volume VIII, 287.
76. Outler, *Works*, Volume I, 5
77. Telford, *Letters*, Volume II, 292
78. Ibid., 294-295 (societies), 299 (watchnight), 300 (class tickets), 302 (lovefeast), 305 (stewards to distribute charity).
79. F.Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (1970), 117
80. Jackson, *Works* Volume III, 148. April 13, 1758 was the date on which Thomas Walsh left England for Ireland. ,
81. H.E. Luccock and P.Hutchinson. *The Story of Methodism* (New York, 1926), 103
82. L.Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, Volume II (3rd edition, 1876), 22-23
83. see Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, 180-196 & Telford, *Letters*, Volume 5, 143-145
84. quoted Davies, George & Rupp, editors, *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Volume 4, (1988), 119
85. The phrase is William Bramwell's in his circular letter of November 10 1796 to the Methodist Superintendent Ministers which was reproduced in *The Wesley Banner and Revival Record*, 1851, 172
86. W.J.Shrewsbury, *An Essay on the Scriptural Character of the Wesleyan-Methodist Economy* (1839), 205

Chapter Three

The Development of Methodist Revivalism

1. Introduction

Methodism thought of itself as a revival movement. The annual address of the British Wesleyan Conference of 1840 declared that: "Some churches regard revivals of religion as gracious singularities in their history, we regard them as central to our existence. If a regular series of divine visitations, issuing in the conversion of sinners be not vouchsafed to us, we must either change the spiritual constitution of our discipline, or we shall pine away from the tribes of Israel."¹ Revival, therefore, was an expression of Methodism's basic sense of identity. The approach adopted towards promoting a revival was known as "revivalism" and there were proper and improper forms of revivalism. "Proper Wesleyan revivalism" sought to promote revival through the plain, pointed preaching of the distinctive Methodist doctrines which acted upon the heart and woke up the conscience.² Accordingly a proper Wesleyan revival was quiet, steady, assured growth in genuine members and piety. These concepts of revival and revivalism correspond to the "High Church" element in Wesley's synthesis. Then there was what Jabez Bunting described as "the rant and extravagancies of what is called Revivalism."³ This corresponded to the original London-Oxford-Bristol "Charismatic" element in Wesley's synthesis.

John Wesley's concepts of revivalism emphasised the role of the itinerant preacher and his act of preaching as being the initiators of revival. John Wesley's concepts of revivalism can be classified as passive or providential revivalism since the preacher was content to preach the gospel as fervently and persuasively as possible and to leave the outcome to the

unpredictable work of the Holy Spirit who might or might not bless the preaching with a revival.

In this chapter other kinds of revivalism will be classified and described. Praying revivalism was the work of the laity. It could be set in motion by the preacher, as in the case of the revival at Weardale, or it could be set in motion spontaneously by the people themselves either during a service or in a cottage class or prayer meeting. Worked-up revivalism was a deliberate, self-conscious, combined attempt by preachers and people to produce expectations of a revival through impassioned, prolonged, loud, vocal prayer backed up by fervent preaching. This kind of revivalism was not content to wait passively for the Holy Spirit to grant or to withhold a revival. It positively demanded the Holy Spirit to send a revival. The next stage of revivalism was to deliberately stage manage expectations of a revival. The camp-meeting was an open air, stage managed version of worked-up praying revivalism. Preachers and people were still working in partnership. Further developments of stage managed revivalism restored the initiative to instigating a revival to the preachers. The difference between the stage managed preacher centred revivalism and the passive preacher centred revivalism was that the preachers were specialised revivalist preachers. This development was imported from North America and took the form of protracted meetings conducted for a period ranging from a few weeks to a few months by a single preacher occupying the same pulpit. The final development of stage managed revivalism was special missions conducted by connexionally appointed revivalist preachers.

The sources for tracing the development of Methodist revivalism are either fragmentary or dispersed. Methodism did not produce a specific genre of revival literature like that of the Congregational churches of New England.⁴ Instead news of revivals has to be garnered

from references in Wesley's Journal, letters to Wesley from Methodist preachers and lay workers, and the lives and obituaries of Methodist preachers and notable lay workers. Accounts of local revivals are scattered throughout the Arminian, Methodist and Wesleyan magazines. In some biographies there are chapters devoted to accounts of outstanding periods or regions of revival.⁵

Special emphasis in this chapter is laid on charismatic revivalism within Methodism which was basically a movement of the laity. This feature of revivalism has been highlighted by the recent work on revival by scholars like Harry Stout, Marilyn Westerkamp, Deborah Valenze, and Robert Colls who stress the important part played by the laity in the Great Evangelical Awakening in the United Kingdom and North America. Harry Stout brings out the significance of George Whitefield's indiscreet, youthful denunciations of local clergy in his open-air preaching to vast crowds in both the "Old" and the "New" Worlds in the 1740s when he says that the obvious implication was that "the people would have to be the central characters" in the revival that was taking place.⁶ Marilyn Westerkamp concludes her study of Scots-Irish piety and the Great Awakening by saying: "Many have laid the revivals at the feet of divines like George Whitefield and Gilbert Tennent, but clearly the clergy and laity together created the Great Awakening. In fact, in its truest sense, the Great Awakening represented neither the effectiveness of the itinerants nor this spirit of clerical-lay cooperation, but the ultimate power of the laity."⁷ Deborah Valenze has drawn attention to the importance of the part played by the cottage prayer meeting in the growth of Methodism.⁸ Robert Colls lays great emphasis upon the relationship between Methodism and the people who embraced it. As he argues, "any appreciation of Methodism which started with 'Its' effect on the people was misconceived. In an era of explosive growth the starting point must be the people's effect on 'It'."⁹

This chapter, therefore, seeks to correct Leslie Church's estimate of the prayer meeting "as a nondescript affair which has little definite place in the history or development of Methodism"¹⁰ by tracing the development of Methodist revivalism as a prayer based religious movement of the laity sometimes in cooperation with, and often either independently of or in opposition to, the itinerant Methodist Preachers. In so doing it traces the collapse of Wesley's ideal concept of the Methodist Preacher as an itinerant evangelistical pastor under the pressure of the phenomenal growth of Methodism as a national religious body, and the passing of revival from the Preachers and people into the hands of specialist itinerant revivalists.

2. Praying Revivalism

Wesleyan Revivalism from its very beginnings contained an undercurrent of "praying revivalism" inspired by the people themselves and expressing itself through the medium of informal, rowdy, sometimes hysterical, prayer. Very often the presence of the preacher was a sufficient excuse to set the drama of popular praying revivalism in motion for the preacher did not even need to preach in some cases. The evening meeting at Nicholas-street, Bristol on May 21, 1739 was the shape of things to come for Wesley was, "interrupted... almost as soon as [he] begun to speak by the groans of one who was 'pricked at heart', and strongly groaned for pardon."¹¹ At Norwich on February 30, 1761 at a band-meeting after the evening service, "While a poor woman was speaking a few artless words out of the fulness of her heart, a fire was kindled, and ran as the flame among the stubble, through the hearts of all that heard."¹² The revival at Weardale in 1772 may have been set in motion during the preaching service but it was preceded by prayer meetings

conducted by three of the local leaders, and the momentum of the revival was sustained by the prayer meetings conducted by the same three men.

Once praying revivalism was set in motion it could develop a life of its own independent of the preachers. In 1805 there was a dramatic revival at Bradford: "The doors of the octagon chapel for ten or twelve weeks were scarcely ever closed, either by day or by night; one party of worshippers frequently waiting without, till those within had fulfilled the appointed hour of service. The regular preaching, during that period, was of necessity almost laid aside; no sooner in many instances was the text announced, than the cries of persons in distress so interrupted the preacher, that the service of the word was at once exchanged for one of general and earnest intercession."¹³

Praying Revivalism was most at home in the cottage meeting, which is not surprising, since Methodism, from its very beginnings, was basically a loose association of cottage based class and society meetings under the supervision of travelling preachers based in towns and the larger villages.¹⁴ The great object of the field-preaching conducted by these preachers was to win converts or adherents who would be willing to open their houses for regular visits and services by the preachers. Between their visits the responsibility for the continued life of the class or society depended on local lay leadership. Alice Cross of Booth-bank, near Manchester was one such lay leader. She was a farmer's wife who, after the conversion of her husband, "gladly received the servants of God in to their dwelling, had a pulpit fixed in their largest room, and had a church in their house for many, many years. A Society was formed, and Alice made the leader of the class. .. When they happened to be disappointed of a preacher, she would occupy the pulpit."¹⁵

An impetus towards a more consistent exercise of this kind of leadership was provided by the actions of some Anglican clergymen in Cornwall who took advantage of the threat

of the Jacobite invasion by the "Young" Pretender" in 1745 to impress virtually every lay preacher in the county for armed service. "Under these circumstances a new class of labourers [was] raised up in almost every place," according to Thomas Jackson. "They did not preach in the usual sense of that term, but held meetings for prayer, and addressed the people on the subject of religion, giving them requisite encouragement and admonition, and calling them that were without to repentance."¹⁶

The cottage meeting became a more self-conscious, prayer based method of revivalism in many parts of Methodism in the early 1760s. Matthew Mayer of Stockport and John Morris of Manchester began to hold prayer-meetings at Dukinfield and the villages round about from 1762 onwards. Many who attended these meetings responded so favourably to the exhortations to flee from the wrath to come that "upwards of sixty persons were awakened and added to the Society at Davy-Hulme within a few weeks."²⁰ By 1763 Billy Brammah, a tailor and exhorter, and his wife Alice, were holding noisy, revival prayer-meetings in their house at Sheffield.²¹ At Halifax a cottage prayer meeting was begun by James Parker, John Holroyde, and Isaac Wade in Wade's house on their return from hearing William Grimshaw preach one Sunday: "The neighbours heard the singing and, drawn by a power they did not understand, entered the house and stayed to pray. The three friends decided to meet again the following Sunday evening. In spite of taunts and sneers they continued the weekly meetings. Others opened their houses..."²²

The burgeoning cottage prayer meetings were brought into disrepute by the activities of George Bell in London between 1761 and 1763. Bell was a former Lifeguardsman who was converted in 1758. His experience of entire sanctification in March 1761 led him into excessive kinds of enthusiastic behaviour. He claimed to be infallible, above temptation, and superior to the instruction of other people. He claimed to have affected a miraculous

cure, and blamed the failure of a second attempt to perform a similar kind of miracle on the patient's lack of faith. Bell caused a great panic in 1763 when he prophesied that the world would come to an end on a certain day in that year. On the dreaded day many were afraid to go to bed; some held prayer-meetings during the night; others went out into the fields to escape the earthquake they thought would destroy London. Wesley publicly disassociated himself from Bell in a newspaper advertisement. Bell eventually lost his religious ardour: "from being a fanatic, he became a sceptic; he turned politician, was rampant for ultra opinions, and died at an extreme age a 'Radical Reformer'"²⁰

Bell's was a layman's movement in which the cottage prayer meeting replaced the preaching service, for Bell declared that: "God had done with all preachings and sacraments, and was to be found nowhere but in the assemblies of himself and of his London friends."²¹ Wesley found several features of Bell's prayer-meetings to be unsatisfactory: the use of irreverent and flamboyant expressions in prayer, and the glorification of one's own holiness rather than that of God's; excessive concentration on prayers addressed to Christ alone; censorious and intolerant attitude towards those who disagreed with Bell and his followers; the neglecting of temporal duties; and the simultaneous praying by more than one person at a time - which was the cardinal fault in Wesley's opinion.²²

From 1772 onwards in the larger urban areas of Methodism the cottage prayer meetings became an organised method of revivalism among the common people when an association of Methodists for conducting cottage based prayer meetings, variously known as "The Workhouse Preachers" or "The Friendly Union" or "The Community Preachers", was formed in London. The idea caught on and spread to other large towns. "The Village Preachers" were instituted at Bristol, and the "The Prayer Leaders" in Leeds.²³ At

Manchester, in 1798, 212 prayer-leaders visited 64 places in the town and its immediate neighbourhood after chapel hours on a Sunday evening. The small companies of poor, busy, ill-clad working people who met on these occasions were encouraged to attend regularly not only by the familiar environment of a fellow labourer's cottage but also by simple services consisting of "short hymns, short prayers, and short but earnest addresses."²⁴

These prayer associations were organized and led by laymen independently of the Preachers, and had their own plans: "In Huddersfield, in 1818, there were fourteen prayer meetings 'planned', of which twelve were held in private houses. Two were timed to begin at six and the rest at eight o'clock. There was a printed list of the names of the prayer-leaders, who were appointed, in groups of four, to take the meetings which in ten places were held weekly, and in four on alternate weeks."²⁵

Prayer Meetings could be very irregular and ill-conducted in the sense that people were allowed to pray how, and when, and for as long as they pleased. The same phrase would be repeated over and over again with people beating their hands on a chair or table top, or stamping their feet on the floor to emphasize the force of their petitions.²⁶ William Clowes liked to get people "into the faith" and bring down "the cloud of God's glory, that the people might be truly blessed in their souls as well as instructed in divine things" by getting from "six to ten to pray for a minute or two each". Clowes, himself, would fasten upon a phrase and repeat it to the accompaniment of loud fervent amens and hand slaps upon a table or the back of a chair. On one occasion he "got fast hold of" the expression "Lord, bind the devil!" which he repeated about twenty times with "the praying souls" thundering forth "their loud amens" until "we all rose into the faith."²⁷ Its no wonder that a Filey fisherman told his sister that "You mun [sic] shout, is all a matter of shouting."²⁸

Such uninhibited prayer meetings could go on for hours. Adam Clarke found prayer meetings at Dublin in 1790 "hardly ever breaking up before ten or eleven o'clock, and frequently continued to twelve and one; and in these meetings some have taken on them to give exhortations of half an hour and sometimes forty-five minutes in length."²⁹ Such "irregular, ill-conducted" meetings could be, as Wesley had reassured him on a previous occasion, "productive of much good."³⁰ Wesley was prepared to accept the irregularities because the prayer meetings were, as he informed Ann Bolton in 1783, "In many places... of more use than even the preaching. And in them the flame first broke out which afterward spread through the whole people."³¹ They were also a highly effective means of maintaining the momentum of a revival for Wesley advised Hannah Ball to keep the revival at High Wycombe in 1786 going by not neglecting the prayer meetings.³²

The attempts by some of the Travelling Preachers to curb the worst excesses of praying revivalism created disaffection with their authority, especially with the outbreak of the American War of Independence in 1775. The first year of the War saw the Conference of 1775 having to deal with "several letters intimating that many of the preachers were unqualified for the work, having neither grace nor gifts for it."³³ John Pawson was one of the preachers accused in this manner. A revival broke out at Leeds which was "attended with some degree of wild-fire, occasioned by the imprudence of a well-meaning, weak man who had more zeal than knowledge." Pawson laboured with all "the prudence and tenderness" he was master of "to preserve the good, and remove the evil", only to be accused to Wesley "as an opposer of the work." Wesley dealt with the matter with such "great prudence" as to keep the peace to the satisfaction of all concerned.³⁴ John Pawson found a similar restlessness at Manchester in 1784, which required similar restraint: "Many of the people in Manchester, and in different parts of the Circuit, were exceedingly lively,

zealous and active. And we had much of the power and presence of the Lord with us, so that His blessed work greatly prospered in our hands. Some of the people were in great danger of running into wildness; but with all the prudence and tenderness we were masters of, we endeavoured to guard against everything of the kind, and our labours were not in vain."³⁵ In 1785, when Thomas Taylor was on the Leeds Circuit, his patience was sorely tried by the unwillingness of the people "to be brought into order, when they have been accustomed to live without it... there were several local preachers who ought not to have been private members, whose conduct was even immoral.." "³⁶

There were some revivalists who refused to be brought to order. At Manchester there was John Broadhurst, a wealthy draper, who had formed an association known as the Band Room Methodists, which met in a room owned by him. They conducted a self-regulated programme of open-air meetings, and typical, disorderly, revivalistic, cottage prayer meetings separate from the circuit plan, and the supervision of the Preachers. At Warrington an eccentric group of "Quaker Methodists" led such an independent existence that they requested the Superintendent minister to stop planning his very infrequent services so that they would not have to contribute to his upkeep. Their chapel was the hub of a lively network of cottage prayer meetings. Enthusiastic and ungovernable revivalist groups belonging to the Methodist New Connexion were led at Stockport by Gamaliel Swindells, and at Macclesfield by John Berrisford. All these groups resisted pressure from the Preachers to conform to the regular norms of the Methodist Discipline, and in 1805, together with a group of disaffected Anglicans at Oldham, came together to form Independent Methodism, united by a "common dedication to liberty, commitment to free gospelism, and disavowal of the professional ministry."³⁷

Praying revivalism was a genuine democratic movement of the labouring class. Anyone could pray irrespective of age, sex, wealth, education and status. It gave a voice to the most despised and most inarticulate people in the sense that they had the liberty to shout the simplest utterance that came into their heads. The presence of a preacher was unnecessary. At Arkengarthdale in February 1868 a revival broke out in the Sunday School one Sunday morning. It caught fire at the evening service conducted by a venerable local preacher. The after service prayer meeting did not finish until one o'clock in the morning. The "sound of the singing and cries of anguish, and the shouts of triumph" kept the whole neighbourhood awake! The revival continued for eleven weeks with the chapel open every day from seven o'clock at night to one o'clock in the morning: "One remarkable feature about it was that there was hardly a sermon preached in all that time. No evangelist came to conduct the services."³⁸

In the final analysis it is easier to describe praying revivalism than to define it. It had a variety of locations and forms. It could take place in a chapel or in a private home, or it could start in the chapel or a home and spill over into the other. It could start in very formal proceedings like a preaching service, or a cottage meeting designed for exhortation and prayer, and take over the service or the meeting so that there was no need for the preacher to deliver a sermon or the leader to give an exhortation. Its chief characteristic was that people themselves came to play the dominant role in the proceedings. A role that involved a lot of disorderly, extremely noisy, sometimes hysterical and unseemly behaviour. In the 1760s some preachers began to deliberately combine their preaching with the praying of the people to self-consciously generate a revival. Fellow preachers who believed in waiting passively for a revival to take place scornfully called the new technique worked-up revivalism.

3. Worked-up Praying Revivalism

Worked-up revivalism was the product of Preachers and people joining forces to increase self-consciously the emotional pressure exerted by preachers on their hearers for instant conversions through the use of open prayer meetings to close the preaching service instead of the normal exclusive society-meeting confined to the members.³⁹ This self-conscious attempt on the part of preachers to use prayer in generating revivals also took place in the early 1760s. At Wednesbury in 1760 Alexander Mather changed the Society meeting after the service into a prayer meeting conducted by his wife. With this innovation Wesleyan revivalism became more self-conscious by overtly "working up" people's emotions. Some of the converts at the Wednesbury prayer meeting set up their own prayer meeting at Darlaston. There, a young apprentice, Thomas Day, experienced a dramatic conversion which he proceeded to declare openly. This sparked off a revival so that "even the wicked cried for mercy," when they heard him. Eighty-five members were added to the existing forty-eight of the Society in the Michaelmas Quarter of 1760. Ground was purchased, and a preaching house was built in 1761.⁴⁰ The revival spread throughout the Circuit: "In one night it was common to see five or six (and sometimes more) praising God for His pardoning mercy. And not a few in Birmingham, Dudley, and Wolverhampton, as well as in Wednesbury and Darlaston, clearly testified, that the blood of Jesus Christ had cleansed them from all sin. Meantime the societies increased greatly."⁴¹

The older Methodists who had borne the brunt of the infamous anti-Methodist riots of 1743 and 1744 were appalled by the noise and disorder of the prayer meetings. In response Mather's protested that "There was nothing irrational or unscriptural in these meetings"; that "It was perfectly natural for sinners who were overwhelmed with a sense of their sin

and misery to cry aloud for help to Him who is mighty to save; and on some occasions to be inattentive to every surrounding object"; and that "When the answer of peace was returned, it was no wonder if their joy was excessive, for a time, as their preceding sorrow had been". These arguments notwithstanding, the weight of the objections, supported as they were by William Jones, a local man and retired Travelling Preacher, proved too great to resist and Mather was forced to give up holding the after service prayer meetings. The result was that: "Immediately the work began to decay, both as to its swiftness and extensiveness. And though [he] continued to insist as strongly as ever upon the same points, yet there was not the same effect, for want of seconding by prayer meetings the blow given in the preaching."⁴²

William Brammah who became a travelling preacher in 1763 also changed the society meeting at Yarm into a prayer meeting conducted by his wife and encountered the same objections as Mather for Wesley had to warn William Brammah through an intermediary in 1768 that his wife's after service prayer meetings were causing offence by their unseemly disorder and enthusiasm: "The matter is short: all things in divine worship must 'be done decently and in order.' Two must never pray at the same time, nor interrupt one another. Either Alice Brammah must take advice or the Society warned to keep away from her."⁴³

Unfortunately for Mather and Brammah their innovations had coincided with the excesses of George Bell in London. However, in January 1794 Mather was requested by the leaders of the Hull Society to conduct a prayer meeting after the next service he conducted at Hull as a follow-up to the revival which broke out at Hull during the Christmas Love-feast of 1793: "Many [were] greatly quickened.. and another obtained the cleansing virtue of the blood of Jesu."⁴⁴ This request was due to the fresh impetus given to the innovations of Mather and Brammah in the 1760s by the work of William Bramwell.⁴⁵

In 1791 Bramwell was stationed on the Dewsbury Circuit. Upon entering the circuit he began a practice he was to repeat elsewhere. He began to pray each day before breakfast - at four in the morning in the summer, and at five in the winter - for revival to break out among the people. This regular habit of prayer for revival was supplemented by colossal exertions in prayer in circuits where he thought the spiritual vitality of the people was at a particularly low ebb. At Leeds in 1801 he prayed for up to four hours on end in a wood belonging to a local Methodist. As was the custom in those days he prayed in a very loud voice so that "the sounds of his strong and mellifluous voice reverberated through all the dells and glades.." ⁴⁶

Like Mather and Brammah he enlisted the aid of female prayer-leaders - most notably Mary Barrit and Ann Cutler. Of Mary Barrit's work at Leeds between 1795 and 1797 he said: "I never knew one man so blessed as this young woman in the salvation of souls." ⁴⁷ He attributed the eventual outbreak of the Great Yorkshire Revival in the winter of 1792 and the spring of 1793 to the work of Ann Cutler (one of his converts from his days as a local preacher at Preston) who "joined us in continual prayer to God for the revival of His work." Under the stimulus of Ann Cutler's prayers revivals broke out at Dewsbury, Greetland, Birstall, Leeds, Bradford and Otley. ⁴⁸

Like Mather at Wednesbury, Bramwell found the assistance of lay prayer-leaders a great help in promoting and spreading revivals. He would organize them into bands of three to pray house by house throughout a neighbourhood. Thomas Crowther of Gomersall, near Leeds, during the Great Yorkshire Revival of 1792 "was regularly found in the prayer meetings, love-feasts, &c., pointing the wounded sinner to the Lamb of God; and wrestling with God, in fervent and unceasing prayer for those in distress. His labours were so much blessed in this work, that he was frequently invited, by some of the Preachers who knew

him, to visit Wakefield, Huddersfield, Sheffield &c., to assist them by his prayers and exhortations."⁴⁹

In Bramwell's person and ministry the characteristic features of a charismatic revival and of a charismatic revivalist were once more united as they had originally been in the person and ministry of Wesley at Bristol in 1739. At Bingley (in the Birstal Circuit) in 1793, the trances of the consumptive young girl, Elizabeth Dickinson, "drew thousands to prayer meetings." At Nottingham the situation was nicely primed for Bramwell's arrival in 1798 by Thomas Tatham, one of the leaders, who interrupted a Sunday morning service to inform those present that he had been given a divine vision promising a welcome and the forgiveness of sins to the vilest sinner.⁵⁰ Bramwell, himself, was credited with extraordinary powers in the best millenarian traditions. He could read the inmost depths of the human heart. Once he looked earnestly at a woman who had been a member of the Methodist Society for many years and told her she was a hypocrite, and that if she did not repent and become converted hell would be her everlasting portion. The woman was duly convicted of her guilt, and later that day experienced the conversion Bramwell had told her to obtain.⁵¹ Bramwell had the supernatural gift of foreknowledge. On one occasion he warned a woman not to embark upon a voyage to North America. She took heed of his warning, and the boat was duly lost at sea with the loss of all its crew and passengers. He could heal people. At Thorngumbald on the Hull Circuit in 1805 the recovery of a young girl from severe whooping cough was dated from the day he prayed for her restoration to health.⁵²

Bramwell was conscious of the opposition within Methodism dating from that experienced by Mather at Wednesbury in 1761, towards the noise, disorder, spurious conversions, and loss of converts associated with revivalism, and drew up some

"Regulations for the conduct of Revival Prayer Meetings to prevent spurious noise and disorder and unnecessary loss of converts." He recommended that: in the first place, two or three people saying short prayers in succession should open the prayer meeting. A person in distress should be approached and spoken to in a low voice by only one other person; secondly, any "praying company" gathered round a "mourner" should pray in succession, and as quietly as possible. While this was going on a "proper person" should continue to lead the meeting, and keep the rest engaged in general prayers and hymn singing until one of the "mourners" was "set at liberty" when all those present would join in acknowledging their "deliverance"; thirdly, a person should be appointed to make a note of the names and addresses of the people professing conversion so that they could be contacted later with a view to joining a class, and to being introduced into the life of the society; and fourthly, great care should be taken in selecting only people of the highest character to lead prayer meetings; and that care be taken "not to depend too much on any particular persons, by expecting them to take the most active or useful part therein, lest our dependence be more in man than in God."⁵³

Apart from his use of intercessory prayer to work up expectations of a revival, Bramwell was a model Methodist Preacher in the High Church /Charismatic synthesis. He accepted Wesley's teaching that it was his duty to preach the Gospel in order to save souls, and to consolidate the conversions he achieved by observing the system of Methodist Discipline as drawn up by Wesley. His mornings were spent in his study. He was a self-educated man well versed in the Biblical languages, and in French. His afternoons were spent in visiting from house to house: "These visits were short and spiritual. If possible he would have the whole family collected, and having ascertained their several religious states he would pray for each by name."⁵⁴ The theme of his preaching was Entire

Sanctification; "He preached a present and full salvation through faith in the Redeemer's blood.. on the entire destruction of sin and the complete renewal of the heart in holiness.. This was his constant, his favourite theme." It was Bramwell's conviction that "evangelising success varied directly with fidelity to the preaching of sanctification." In this conviction he was of one mind with John Wesley who wrote of the growth of Methodism at Launceston: "Here I found the plain reason why the work of God has gained no ground in this Circuit all the year. The preachers have given up the Methodist testimony. Either they did not speak of perfection at all (the peculiar doctrine committed to our trust), or they spoke of it only in general terms, without urging the believers to 'go on unto perfection' and to expect it every moment. And wherever this is not earnestly done, the work of God does not prosper."⁵⁵ As a result of Bramwell's emphasis on Entire Sanctification the normal round of Methodist meetings - Love-feasts, band and prayer meetings - became occasions for conversions.

Bramwell's efforts to consciously harness the lay initiative of praying revivalism to Wesley's synthesis of ideal Wesleyan revivalism were discredited by what his official obituary in 1819 described as a "instability of conduct in his attachment to the Methodist body";⁵⁶ and by the refusal of the cottage prayer movement to accept restraint upon its activities. At Leeds, in 1797, Bramwell and Henry Taylor were involved in secret talks with Alexander Kilham at which "both spoke freely on the necessity of reform, and seemed determined to have this effected or leave the Connexion." Kilham, however, correctly doubted their resolution, for "they appeared so exceedingly afraid of the higher powers."⁵⁷ At Leeds, again, between 1801 and 1803, Bramwell did leave the Wesleyan Connexion because of his dissatisfaction with his superintendent minister's action in stopping the noisy

prayer meetings being held at the newly opened Albion Street chapel, and with the decision to divide the circuit.⁵⁸

Bramwell's unstable conduct reflected the unstable character of the revivals he helped to promote. The embryo establishment of Methodism - composed of men like Mather, Coke, Pawson, Atmore, Benson and Thompson who had drawn up the Plan of Pacification - had ambitions to make Methodism into a Church, and the prayer meeting movement with its independent, undisciplined ways was an unruly, disruptive threat to that ambition that had to be disciplined and brought to heel⁵⁹ rather than to be co-opted into Methodism's task of evangelism, which was Bramwell's solution of the problem. The ideal was revival conceived as steady, consolidated growth in genuine members and piety without revivalism. The concept of Methodist ministry and growth for the nineteenth century was clearly expressed by George Smith in his "History of Wesleyan Methodism" when he said of the revivals that attended the ministry of Gideon Ouseley and others between 1805 and 1809: "Undue importance should not be attached to those special manifestations of grace usually called "revivals",- when great numbers of persons are awakened and brought to God in a comparatively short time,- as a means of Methodist progress and increase. The ordinary operation of the Spirit, blessing the word, and leading the hearers to turn from their sins to the Lord, has ever been the means of rearing up and maintaining the Methodist Societies. The pious labours of godly ministers, whose word descends as the dew, and, under the fructifying influence of the Holy Ghost, produces 'the fruits of good living to the praise and glory of God,' has been the normal state of Methodism in all stages of its progress; and the continued existence of this gracious power must ever be the means of prosperity to the Connexion."⁶⁰

William Bramwell, therefore, stands at the apex of the development of Wesley's ideal synthesis of High Church/Charismatic revivalism within Wesleyan Methodism. His achievement lies in recognizing that Wesley's ideal of Methodist revivalism needed to become a partnership between pulpit and pew, between chapel and cottage. He recognized the danger of unrestrained enthusiasm, and sought to control and to channel it within the mainstream of Methodist church life under the sympathetic leadership of the Travelling Preachers. He did this by self-consciously taking the initiative in "working up" a revival through impassioned, persistent prayer with the assistance of lay praying leaders, including women.

Methodists are inveterate hero worshippers. Bramwell became the hero of the revival element within Wesleyan Methodism and served as the role model for numerous revival minded Methodist ministers well into the nineteenth century. Chief among these were John Smith, David Stoner, John Nelson Jnr, William Miller, and Thomas Collins. Other notable hero worshippers were James Sigston, Henry Breeden and James Everett who led secessions like Protestant Methodism in 1828, Arminian Methodism in 1832 and Reformed Methodism in 1849.⁶¹ Bramwell, therefore, also became the hero of the revival minded anti-establishment movement in Wesleyan Methodism.

4 .Stage-managed Praying Revivalism - the Camp-meetings.

The revivals in the North of England in which William Bramwell played such a leading part were part of the many revivals which gave Methodism such a dramatic increase in numbers during the Revolutionary Wars against France. In the decade between 1805 and 1815 Wesleyan Methodism gained 90,404 members at an average rate of 9,000 members per annum. There were outstanding revivals at Bradford in 1805, Keighley and Rochester in 1806, and in Cornwall in 1814. Gideon Ouseley and his colleagues were successful in

promoting revivals in Ireland; and in Wales there were two districts, 25 circuits, and 58 preachers by 1815 where none had existed before 1805.⁶²

The most significant revival of the period between 1805 and 1815 took place on the Burslem circuit in North Staffordshire in 1805. It began in the chapel at Harriseahead in the vicinity of Mow Cop among the mining communities in the area. The society had been formed in 1802 as a result of the evangelistic work of Hugh Bourne, a carpenter from Bemersley, who had formed his converts into a class and built a chapel for them. The leaders of the revival were Hugh Bourne, and two miners - Daniel Shubotham (Bourne's cousin) and Matthias Bayley. A notable convert of the revival was the potter William Clowes. To preserve the momentum of the revival an open-air prayer meeting - inspired by the camp-meetings of North America, and by the presence of the American revivalist, Lorenzo Dow - was held on the summit of Mow Cop on May 31, 1807. A second one was held at Norton-le-Moors on August 23-25, 1807. It was held in defiance of a ruling by the Wesleyan Conference that, although Camp Meetings were allowable in America, they were "highly improper in England, and likely to be of considerable mischief; and we disclaim all connection with them."⁶³ The English establishment was deeply alarmed by the rapid growth of Methodism during a critical phase of the war with revolutionary France, and it is possible that the Wesleyan Conference wanted to allay fears that Methodism was an incipient threat to the stability of English society. The more immediate cause, however, could have been the more mundane one that camp meetings, conducted by lay preachers and prayer leaders, were irregular departures from accepted Wesleyan forms of worship.⁶⁴

Bourne's commitment to camp-meetings led to the loss of his Wesleyan membership in June 1808. William Clowes lost his membership in June 1810. Both men had large followings of people converted and gathered into classes as a result of their strenuous

evangelistic efforts in the Burslem area. Their relationship with the parent Wesleyan body was brought to a head with the expulsion of James Steele from the Tunstall society in April 1811. He was an outstanding personality: "He had been connected with Methodism for twenty-four years and held several positions of responsibility in the society."⁶⁵ His expulsion led to a schism in the Tunstall society. Bourne built a chapel for Steele and his followers at Tunstall in 1811. The opening of the chapel on July 13 was preceded by the decisions in May for the followers of Bourne, Clowes and Steele to form their own Methodist movement by issuing their own class tickets, and by forming their own circuit with Steele as the circuit steward, and with William Clowes and James Crawford as full time paid evangelists. In February 1812 the new movement adopted the name of Primitive Methodists.⁶⁶

Bourne was a firm believer in the value of the kind of fervent praying made popular by William Bramwell. He recorded in his journal for March 17, 1803: "I was greatly struck with the expression 'The violent take the Kingdom. The violent take it. They now take it' by force." Six years later, on November 21, 1809 he registered his increasing commitment to the praying with confident faith: "I determined to increase my pace... this must be by believing more, so I began steadfastly to believe that the Lord answered whenever I prayed. When I prayed for sinners, I believed that the Lord shook their hearts and when I prayed for believers I believed that the Lord sent power, from me to them."⁶⁷

Like so many popular revivalists he began his career as an unofficial "public praying labourer" at a cottage prayer meeting in the home of Jane Hall at Harriseahead: "Newly won believers flocked to this prayer meeting and showed intense eagerness to join in its exercises... One week-night in particular, enthusiasm rose high, prayers were full of life, and many were waiting their turn to engage in supplication when the closure had to be

applied. To mitigate the disappointment of those who would have liked longer time, Daniel Shubotham said: 'You shall have a meeting upon Mow some Sunday and have a whole day's praying, and then you'll be satisfied.'⁶⁸

The first camp-meeting was typical worked-up revivalism, with preaching and praying during the morning and afternoon, gradually giving way to an evening of praying. William Clowes described the scene at its "most magnificent and sublime" between noon and four in the afternoon: "Four preachers simultaneously crying to sinners to flee from the wrath to come; thousands listening... some praising God aloud for the greatly things which were brought to pass; whilst others were rejoicing in the testimony which they had received, that their sins, which were many, had been all forgiven... About four o'clock in the afternoon the number of people was prodigiously large; but after this time many began to move off the ground and to retire homewards... Towards the conclusion the services were principally carried on by praying companies, and at the close, which took place about half-past eight o'clock in the evening, several souls were set at liberty."⁶⁹

Bourne's more detailed account describes how the initial inclement weather gave way by six o'clock in the morning to a fine but rather cold day. Proceedings began with one preaching "stand" manned by "two holy men from Knutsford." The steady increase in the crowd attending led to a second "stand" being erected. "Returning over the field" from supervising the setting up of this stand, Bourne found "a company at a distance from the first stand praying for a man in distress... Nearer the first stand was another company praying with mourners." These companies had formed spontaneously in the best tradition of praying revivalism. A third preaching stand was established at noon; and a fourth soon after. As the crowds moved rapidly off homewards from four o'clock onwards only one preaching stand was needed by six o'clock in the evening. The great majority of those left

behind were apparently children for "About seven o'clock in the evening, a work began among the children.."70

In 1816 Bourne drew up rules for conducting camp-meetings in which he expressed his growing conviction that prayer was more effective in promoting revivals than preaching: "arrangements were made to have one hour for prayer, then an hour for preaching, then an hour for prayer, and so on through the day."71 The concept of preaching at camp-meetings was modified to cover a variety of activities including preaching, prayer, exhortations, and relating experiences. Bourne also introduced the use of what he called "reading services" when "the preacher read to the crowd around him some poignant biography, together with an obituary from a religious magazine, the kind of article which always ended with a long drawn out, triumphant death-bed, full of cries and quotations from remembered revival songs. Then there was singing, used on Bourne's principle, 'Let a little singing be intermingled to vary occasionally the exercises.'"72

When Bourne came to write his "History of the Primitive Methodists" in 1822 he revised his account of the first camp-meeting to justify the rules he had drawn up in 1816: "The English Camp-meetings originated in the idea of a day's praying, which was contemplated for some years. When the first Camp-meeting was held, it was attended by unexpected multitudes of people, among whom were abundance of pious labourers of various descriptions. Two stations were occupied entirely as praying stations: and at these the work broke out, and souls were converted to God. Four other stations were occupied, at which the worship was carried on by preachers, exhorters, and other pious praying labourers with great variety and diversity of the exercises. About six in the evening, a general praying service commenced; during which, the work again broke out, and six souls... were all brought into the liberty of the children of God. So the Divine

Providence marked out the praying services, as the origin, and the most excellent part of the Camp-meetings. Carrying on the worship at different stations was almost equally marked out by the hand of Providence."⁷³

Many of Bourne's colleagues ignored "the order of Divine Providence" and continued to preach long, unsuitable sermons which robbed the camp-meetings of their vitality and appeal. In 1832 it was found necessary to ask: "How may the Camp Meetings be rendered more efficient, and useful?" The answer was: "Let the praying services be as fully supported as possible. And as reading services have been rendered very useful, let, at least, one reading service take the place of preaching; in the forenoon, and another in the afternoon. Let one sermon at least be preached to the children. Also, if need be, let any preacher have two minutes notice to conclude. Also, when the work so breaks out that there is praying with mourners to attend to, then one or more of the preachings must be given up, unless a permanent praying company can be formed, especially for praying with mourners."⁷⁴

From letters published in the Methodist magazine for 1803 it would appear that the great revival of religion in the frontier states of North America which gave rise to the camp-meetings began in Tennessee in 1800 among the Presbyterians at what they appear to have called a General Meeting for the Administration of the Sacrament.⁷⁵ This practice had been imported into North American Presbyterianism from Scotland where there was, during the summer months, a Communion Season when each parish held its annual celebration of the Sacrament over an extended weekend. Ministers and people from neighbouring parishes up to thirty miles away attended the event.⁷⁶ The event involved giving local hospitality for several days to people who had had to travel the long distances necessary to attend these administrations of the sacrament. There were also shorter, more

local, Social Meetings for public prayer. In North America the protracted nature of these meetings under the stimulus of the enthusiasm engendered by the revival gave rise to the need for properly organized camps, the first of which appears to have been held at Gasper River Presbyterian Church, Kentucky in 1800; and which was attended by Methodist preachers and people as well as Presbyterians.⁷⁷

The American Methodists so enthusiastically adopted the camp-meeting as a method for promoting revival that it became a "largely Methodist undertaking in the nineteenth century..⁷⁸ Bourne, says John Kent, "adopted the system for English use as an open-air method of revival. There was no camp, of course, for few of the people interested would have been free to attend one. These English meetings took place on a Sunday, the one day when the rural workers were comparatively at liberty; they lasted from dawn to dusk, and were often rounded off with a love-feast in a convenient local chapel."⁷⁹

Bourne, however, did more than adopt and amend the camp-meeting to English conditions. Bourne was a genuine innovator. What Bourne really adapted for Primitive Methodist use was the original one day Social Meeting for public prayer held by the Presbyterians. As William Towler, a Primitive Methodist missionary to the United States, pointed out of the camp meeting held near New York on July 11, 1846: "as camp-meetings here are different from those in England, and last for a week or more, it was called 'A day's meeting in the wood'."⁸⁰ Bourne is to be given credit for the imaginative way in which he sought to control and channel the communal, informal, highly emotional cottage and chapel based prayer meetings into the ordered ritual of the camp-meeting. Under Bourne's leadership cottage praying became field praying. The Bath Chronicle of 1829 described how, at a camp meeting held on Combe Down, "After the sermon the Director commanded separate lots, Camerton friends to the left, Frome to the right, Coleford to the

front, Bath stay near the wagons. Each company then began to sing different tunes, then kneeled to pray, swaying and bawling as loud as they could until black in the face and suffused with perspiration. This continued until the evening when they separated."⁸¹

If Bramwell stands at the apex of Wesley's ideal High Church/Charismatic revivalism then Bourne stands at the apex of Praying revivalism. From these respective high points revival was gradually taken away from the common people and became the contrived, stage-managed event of specialist, itinerant evangelists.

5. Stage-managed Revivalism - The Protracted Meeting

The Protracted Meeting was a series of daily revival meetings conducted by the same preacher in the same pulpit for a period ranging from a few weeks to a few months. Like the camp-meeting it was a North American method of revivalism made popular by Charles Finney.⁸² It was introduced into English Methodism between 1841 and 1847 by a visiting North American freelance revivalistic preacher called James Caughey - an emigrant Irishman who had been ordained as a minister by the Troy Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America in 1836.

Success as a revivalist preacher in Massachusetts and in eastern Canada, further reinforced by a vision of Christ, emboldened him to visit the British Isles. He arrived in England in 1841 in time to visit the Wesleyan Conference at Manchester where he received an invitation to conduct a series of protracted meetings in Ireland. He returned to England in October 1842 to commence a series of very successful protracted meetings - mostly in the north of England where, at Liverpool, Leeds, Hull, Sheffield, Huddersfield and York in particular: "his meetings interrupted a period of decline or only limited growth and contributed to marked increases in membership."⁸³

Caughey seems to have deliberately courted the sympathy and support of this great northern tradition of local revival movements under local leaders and travelling evangelists not subject to rigorously enforced central control, by reviving memories of William Bramwell. Like Bramwell, he was an imposing figure in the pulpit with "His commanding height, keen eyes, and strong, dark, not unattractive features.." Like Bramwell, he created a mood of expectancy by exhorting his hosts to set all their people praying for a revival. Since he was not a resident preacher in the locality like Bramwell had been, he had to resort to the use of handbills and placards to announce his impending campaign, and to add to the air of expectancy. Like Bramwell, he held prayer meetings immediately after preaching to reinforce the appeal of the sermon. Unlike Bramwell "he regularly used the well- established American device of the call to the altar. Leaving his pulpit he would wander from pew to pew encouraging the anxious to go forward to the communion rail or penitent bench."⁸⁴

Like Bramwell, and John Wesley, Caughey tried to frighten his audiences into the Kingdom of God with "his descriptions of the horrors of hell, the terrors of the Devil, and the severity of the law of God." There was, however, something distastefully theatrical about his claim to receive spontaneous, divine revelations about the dreadful fate awaiting a specific, identifiable individual present in the congregation. At Deadmanstone, on January 6, 1845 Caughey claims that while reading from the lesson the words "and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (Rev.ii,5) - "power came upon me to exhort some backslider present. I did so, with an extraordinary assurance that there was such an one present; talked to him as if he and I were alone with God; described what he was, what now; what his house once was, a place of prayer, its state now; that he was once a 'candlestick,' giving light in his household, but now he was like an empty and lightless

one. My appeals became sharper and sharper, that God was about to remove the candlestick out of his place into the grave, into perdition, unless he repented.. The backslider was present, came forward to be prayed for, and the Lord saved him."⁸⁵ As Richard Carwardine points out: "Such descriptions were usually broad enough to embrace more than a single person, but specific enough to make individuals feel they were being selected for special attention."⁸⁶

James Caughey was not an exceptional figure in America. One who knew him in that country expressed surprise at the success he had achieved in England for his method of holding a Protracted Meeting was common in America and "there are many such parties as Mr.C. and many more able and striking than himself even in his own way..⁸⁷ According to John Kent we must not underestimate the importance of his career in England⁸⁸ for Caughey did more than revive memories of William Bramwell. He renewed Bramwell's call for Methodism to be true to its original calling to be a great agency for promoting revivals and for the saving and sanctifying of souls. "Methodism, from the beginning," he declared, "has been a system of aggression against the devil and his works; let her keep to this, and she will multiply her numbers, and increase both in power and influence. Whenever and wherever she loses this distinguishing feature in her economy, she must dwindle away into insignificance... It is not enough that Methodism is enabled to stand on the defensive, and hold her own... Acquisition should never be effaced from her banners. The devil's territory must be invaded till earth and hell are aroused against her aggressive movements. Then, and not till then, shall Methodism be in the meridian glory of her usefulness."⁸⁹

Caughey was reviving old controversies and threatening the integrity of the Wesleyan ministry which was an uneasy alliance between those who favoured the concepts of

ministry and church growth he was advocating, and those who favoured steady, unspectacular growth through the exercise of the pastoral office. To a young and ardent James Everett in 1807 the choice had been simple: "It is possible to go round the circuit in the regular and quiet discharge of duty, without a burning desire for the salvation of souls, without which the genuine spirit of the Christian ministry evaporates. Nothing short of the life of God in my soul will preserve alive the flame of zeal on behalf of others; and nothing short of seeing others saved can satisfy me."⁹⁰ Ten years earlier Jabez Bunting had written to John Barber at Rotherham bemoaning the lack of converts at Oldham under his preaching to which Barber had replied, "We are sometimes ready to think no good is doing unless sinners are awakened and converted to God; but this is an error. For good is done when the weak are strengthened, the tempted succoured, the wavering confirmed, and the children of God fed with food convenient for them. And this, perhaps, is as much, if not of more importance than the awakening of sinners. At the same time remember that some men are particularly called to this work; and you may be of this number."⁹¹ Bunting was not one of their number, and developed a distaste for what he called "the rant and extravagance of what is called Revivalism."

It was Bunting, however, who cemented an enduring if somewhat uneasy consensus of opinion regarding the combination in one ministry of the difficult task of being both evangelist and pastor. He achieved this consensus at the Liverpool Conference of 1820 when the first reported decrease in the number of members - some 4,688 - since the statistics had been officially registered filled the preachers with guilt. The penitent preachers consecrated themselves and their families afresh to God in order to preach the vital doctrines of the Gospel, to give themselves exclusively to the work of saving souls, and to consider themselves called to be Home Missionaries charged with the task of

extending and enlarging - as well as keeping - the circuits to which they were appointed by using the time-honoured methods of field preaching, prayer meetings, watch-night services, band-meetings, and days of solemn fasting and prayer.⁹² These resolutions were enshrined in the famous Liverpool Minutes which were written by Jabez Bunting as the President of the Conference: "Since they set forth the ideal of a Methodist preacher's life and work, for very many years it was the custom to read them through at the first Preachers' Meeting in every Circuit and at every May Synod in its Pastoral Session. It is interesting to see that the ideal is rather that of a pastor of the flock of Christ than that of a wandering evangelist."⁹³

Caughey was something of an anomaly in the British connexional system. He was a popular freelance who was satisfying a popular need in certain areas of Methodism; but since he had no responsibilities for pastoral care or circuit administration he was not amenable to connexional supervision or control.⁹⁴ The Wesleyan Conference of 1846, "After a long conversation, full of conflicting opinion," accepted the proposal of Jabez Bunting that "the Bishops of the Troy Conference be written to, and requested to recall Mr.Caughey."⁹⁵

6 .Stage-managed Revival - The Special Mission

In retrospect it was the preachers like Caughey who restricted the work of the minister to the one task of 'saving souls' who had a very restricted view of the role of the ministry. Methodism had become, to quote Abel Stevens, " a great organic system, a Church, consolidated at home and constantly extending abroad... settled in its policy, thoroughly organized in its financial and missionary operations... a grand aggregate result of the marvellous events and heroic labours which have hitherto crowded its history."⁹⁶ The great achievement of Jabez Bunting had been to convince the revivalists of their need to exercise a professional administration of the business affairs of the connexion from the Conference

downwards. When Thomas Collins was appointed to the St Alban's circuit in 1845 he wrote: "When, as a visitor, I go out to a place, I have only salvation work to do, but a Superintendent going the round of his Circuit, specially if the Circuit be in difficulties, cannot act as a mere evangelist: foundations have to be examined, institutions kept in order, and finances looked after. Nevertheless, as opportunity serves, I try as hard as ever for the conversion of souls."⁹⁷

Ironically, the last word lay with Caughey for the principle of every circuit minister being his own home missionary was undermined by the growth of Methodism. By 1873 Methodist chapels could be found in five out of every nine places in England and Wales. In 1885 there were 2,500 Methodist chapels in Southern England of which 1,500 were the only Nonconformist building in the place.⁹⁸ The need to build new chapels and to enlarge old ones threw greater administrative burdens on the preachers - especially the superintendents. When Joseph Dixon was endorsed by his circuit Quarterly meeting in 1863 as a candidate for the ministry a senior local preacher laid his hand upon his shoulder and said, "Now you have nothing to do all your life but to save souls." But Joseph Dixon was to find out that: "It is the extras of a minister's life that are burdensome and give so much cause for anxiety. The management of a large circuit is in itself a business, making great demands upon a minister's time and strength, and requiring much business aptitude. When to this is added the work of extension, the securing of new sites, the erection of new chapels, and the raising of money for the same, it involves a great strain upon a minister's physical and mental power."⁹⁹

Accordingly, at the Conference ordination charge of 1879, Dr. J.H.Rigg told the ordinands that "Evangelists are necessary to complete our ministerial provision and equipment, acting now as Home Missionary ministers and District Missionaries."¹⁰⁰ In 1882

one of these District Missionaries, Thomas Cook, was appointed as a Connexional Evangelist. The appointment of Thomas Cook was a belated victory for James Caughey and his method of revivalism. Henry Smart, writing of Thomas Cook's appointment, acknowledged that James Caughey had been "undoubtedly a man of God, and his ministry here was blessed. But he was not a member of the English Conference, nor was he amenable to our ecclesiastical courts. By appointing Mr. Cook to the office of connexional evangelist, the Conference secured itself against the occurrence of irregularities.." ¹⁰¹

Conference also accepted the need for the kind of stage-managed revivalism used by Caughey but adapted to English needs. Thomas Cook, like Caughey, aroused expectations of a revival by using the week preceding his mission services for prayer meetings but Cook, unlike Caughey, prayed specifically for people by name. Cook, like Caughey, used the local press for extensive advertising but unlike Caughey he held special afternoon holiness meetings during the course of the mission to quicken the spiritual life of the local church. His preaching was specific and immediate, directed "in warning sinners to flee from the wrath to come" in tones combining terror and tenderness. Music played a greater part in Cook's missions than it had in Caughey's revival services. In some places singing-bands processed the streets prior to the services in order to arrest public attention, and to draw people into the services; but "A large choir always proved a source of great attraction" in every place missioned. The great difference was the respectable, restrained atmosphere of Cook's services. He held the customary follow-up prayer service but there was "not much opportunity .. for persons to engage in public prayer, nor was there any going about from pew to pew to speak to individuals." Instead he asked people impressed by the sermon to rise in their places, and after praying for them he directed them "to the inquiry-rooms for counsel by experienced Christians." The result was that his services were

"marked by stillness and the absence of excitement.¹⁰² People like Barber, Bunting and their successors had achieved the goal of revival without revivalism which John Wesley had aimed at in 1768.

Primitive Methodism shared the Wesleyan distaste for Caughey's kind of revivalism either by imported specialists in creating revivals or by free lance, home-grown ones.¹⁰³ Primitive Methodists learned very quickly, despite their commitment to the exclusive work of revivalism, that their itinerant preachers needed to be more than mere 'soul-savers'. The rapid expansion of the Connexion in the early 1820s led to a large number of men being recruited by the Connexion who were inexperienced in church affairs, and created societies composed of members as inexperienced as themselves so that a crisis occurred between 1824 and 1828 that "was brought about by defective discipline and financial recklessness or slackness" which was only cured by weeding out the unsuitable preachers.¹⁰⁴

They were succeeded by men like John Parrish and James Garner. Of James Parrish it was said: "His position was unique and interesting. He exercised his thoughtful and energetic ministry whilst our church was in a transition state, passing from the older to the newer Primitive Methodism. He was one of those far sighted, tactful, judicious leaders who helped to give steadiness to the movement. And thus in our time [1910] have come to our beloved and progressive church important reforms and advances without any serious eruptions."¹⁰⁵ James Garner was the superintendent minister who told the young probationer stationed on the Liverpool Circuit in 1859 that if he meant to be an efficient administrator he must give heed to the temperament and idiosyncrasies of the people with whom he would have to deal.¹⁰⁶ The young probationer was John Travis whose circuit career demonstrated that being an administrator meant building chapels and schools, raising the money to fund them, and making the members to fill them. Travis was instrumental in

erecting 15 chapels and 6 schools in the 9 circuits he served in; raising a sum of not less than £20,000 to finance these schemes - apart from the ordinary current expenses of running a circuit; and in adding 850 new members over and above those required to make good the losses through the wastage of death, removals and withdrawals. It was Travis who said: "Primitive Methodism, in its origin, was purely and simply an evangelising movement, but it gradually grew into an organised Christian Church. It had not passed its formative period as a Church before some of its leaders, both ministerial and lay, began to discuss the necessity of giving some training to its ministers in order that they might be better qualified to teach as well as to evangelise, and to edify as well as to convert."¹⁰⁷

Primitive Methodism appointed their first connexional evangelist six years before the Wesleyan Methodists did so. George Warner was appointed the connexion's first travelling evangelist and holiness teacher in 1874. "George Warner had begun his ministry in remote country circuits at the tail end of the heroic phase of Primitive Methodism", says Stuart Mews, "when he had preached in the open air. In the 1870s and 1880s, he was more likely to be found in urban chapels. His appeal now, however, was directed towards securing more costly levels of personal renunciation, commitment and behaviour, or what could be seen as 'respectability.'"¹⁰⁸ The common people had been deprived, even by their avowed champions, of their democratic, religious voice!

7. The Dynamic of Methodist Revival

It was the overwhelming desire of the Methodist preachers and people to share the blessings of the salvation which they had experienced which was the driving motive behind the growth of Methodism. It was recounted of the Wesleyan minister, John Smith, who died at thirty-seven years of age worn out by his zealous revivalistic labours that he listened "with the most patient and respectful attention" to a friend's plea for him to slacken his

efforts, and then "burst into a flood of tears" before recollecting himself to reply: "What you say is correct, I ought to put a restraint on myself, but O! how can I? God has given me such a sight of perishing souls that I am broken-hearted, and can only vent my feelings in the way I do, entreating them to come to God, and pleading with Him to act upon them, and save them. Look around you, my brother, do you not see sinners going to hell! and when I see it and feel it, I am compelled to act."¹⁰⁹ John Smith was not alone in feeling this passion for souls. George Warner, a Primitive Methodist of the next generation, wrote in his diary, "I have sighed and cried to the Lord all this week for souls. One morning at family prayer, my agony of soul was such that I fell under it, and lay for some time unable to do anything but weep and cry to God."¹¹⁰

The zeal of the preachers was matched by the zeal of their converts for the salvation of their souls and for sharing the blessings of salvation with family, friends and neighbours. William Carvosso of Cornwall had a sister who was converted in the year 1771:"and having tasted that the Lord was gracious, she came from Gwinear, a distance of twelve miles, to tell us of the happy news, and to warn us to flee from the wrath to come."¹¹¹ Margaret Cowling was an evangelistic predator: "When in prayer-meetings her vigilant eye was ever and anon turned from pew to pew and form to form in search of penitents; and when successful in discovering them, and bringing them to the penitent's bench... eagerly she kneeled beside the seekers of salvation, poured forth in their ears the instruction suitable for their condition, and then with uplifted hands implored for them the blessings of pardon and peace."¹¹² Both William Downing and Ralph Smith followed up their conversions by visiting their fellow villagers from house to house telling them what the Lord had done for their souls and strongly entreating them to come and worship at the local chapel.¹¹³

Methodist preaching, hymnology, fellowship, and literature combined to mould this faith into a stereotyped pattern of experience which mirrored the spiritual experience of John Wesley. It consisted of a series of graded states of consciousness preceded by growth but achieved in an instant.¹¹⁴ Awakening to one's condition as a sinner condemned to eternal damnation preceded the assurance of the remission of sins; the frustrations of sin remaining within redeemed human nature and a desire for complete consecration to God's will preceded the experience of sanctification. Wesley defined these stages of the Methodist's Christian life as: "(1.) That pardon (salvation begun) is received by faith producing works (2.) That holiness (salvation continued) is faith working by love. (3.) That heaven (salvation finished) is the reward of this faith."¹¹⁵

This attempt by Methodism to mould the experience of its members into a common pattern of experience must not be dismissed as mere indoctrination. Any human attempt to achieve the knowledge of Ultimate Reality, of necessity involves dismissing other points of view as being some kind of false consciousness, and involves the winning of converts to one's own true, enlightened consciousness. J.F.C.Harrison puts the issue into perspective when he says: "Methodism.. in .. its dynamic was primarily not social or economic, but religious. To thousands of ordinary men and women it offered a view of man's nature which harmonized with, and interpreted their own experience... Much has been written... about the pessimism, repression, guilt feelings and psychic inhibitions encouraged by Methodism; and certainly some of its popular manifestations - crude, emotional, narrow, and self-righteous - were unlovely enough. But the message that comes through innumerable accounts of the great Methodist experience of conversion is one of joy and hope. When a miner or farm labourer or domestic servant found Jesus, their life was

transformed. Their religion brought happiness, and a cheerful conviction that in God's providence there was a place for everyone, however humble."¹¹⁶

8. Conclusion

Although it is possible to trace a chronological development in the practice of Methodist revivalism this does not mean that older methods fell into disuse and were replaced by the newer methods of revivalism. Old and new methods of revivalism proceeded side-by-side and could produce some curious hybrids. In 1876 a preacher inspired praying revival broke out at Truro under the preaching of Hugh Price Hughes during a Home Mission service. He had been preaching for twenty minutes when "he became conscious that the spirit of God was upon the congregation in an extraordinary manner."¹¹⁷ He tried to defuse the impending hysteria by taking the collection in the middle of his sermon but on recommencing his sermon had to admit defeat by calling the traditional after service prayer meeting. He tried to contain the noise by calling the penitents to the communion rail and taking the more rowdy into the vestry for personal counselling while calling on the congregation to pray silently for those under a conviction of sin. The call to the communion rail was a technique borrowed from American Methodism and designed to "eliminate the confusion caused by several little prayer-meetings taking place simultaneously in different parts of the house."¹¹⁸ The Home Mission rally fixed for the following day had to be changed to a prayer meeting. Hughes then left to complete his other Home Mission deputation meetings but had to return to Truro on the following Monday to supervise the revival that had broken out. He did this by conducting a Protracted Meeting for the rest of the week which culminated on the Sunday with both the chapel and the courtyard leading to it packed with people so that "as some came out of the building, others took their places and the chapel was crowded until ten

o'clock that night... The revival spread throughout the whole of Cornwall."¹¹⁹

It is easier, therefore, to identify different kinds of Methodist revivalism than it is to provide a definition of them. Besides John Wesley's synthesis of High Church and Charismatic revivalism it is possible to identify: praying revivalism, worked-up revivalism, worked-up praying revivalism, stage managed protracted meeting revivalism, and stage managed special mission revivalism. The one common factor they could all share on occasion was the eruption of unpredictable, volatile, rowdy, sometimes frenzied physical behaviour expressing itself around spontaneous, very noisy, vocal public praying by the common people. Although Wesley was prepared to tolerate this kind of behaviour it gradually came to be very embarrassing to those influential Methodist Preachers, people and adherents who welcomed revival as steady sustained growth in genuine membership and piety without the rant and extravagance of popular, prayer centred revivalism.

The value of this classification of Methodist revivalism is the insight it provides regarding the gradual erosion of John Wesley's ideal concepts of Methodist ministry and church growth. He wanted an itinerant evangelistical pastorate harnessing and supervising the raw energy of popular praying revivalism to a disciplined structure of connexional life and worship. What did happen was a conflict between preachers like Bunting who concentrated on the pastoral element in his synthesis and sought to eliminate enthusiasm from Methodist revival, and preachers like Bramwell who continued to regard Methodism's mission as a revival movement for the mass conversion of people. Both sides had to settle for a compromise involving the appointment of specialised itinerant connexional revivalists. The charismatic stream within Methodism went its own independent ways, though even Primitive Methodism succumbed to the Wesleyan concept of revival without revivalism.

Endnotes

1. Quoted J.Caughey, *Caughey's Letters*, Volume 2 (1845), 244
2. B.Gregory, *Side Lights on the Conflicts of Methodism 1827-1852* (1892), 419
3. Quoted W.R.Ward, "The Religion of the People and the Problem of Control 1790-1830" *Studies in Church History*, Volume 8 (1972), 242-243
4. M.J.Crawford, *Seasons of Grace. Colonial New England's Revival Tradition in its British Context* (1991), 180-196
5. See Chapter X, "Cornish Revivals" in H.T.Smart, *Thomas Cook's Early Ministry* (1892), 194-219 & Chapter VII, "Coleraine - The Great Revival - 1859--1862" in S.Allen, *Memoir of the Rev. George Vance D.D.* (1901), 97-113
6. H.S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist. George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Eerdmans, 1991), 131 also his *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (1988), 195
7. M.J.Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity. Scots-Irish piety and the Great Awakening 1625-1760* (New York, 1988), 213
8. D.M.Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (1985), 50-73
9. R.Samuel, editor, *Peoples' History and Socialist Theory* (1981), 357
10. L.F.Church, *More About the Early Methodist People* (1949), 245
11. Jackson, *Works*, Volume I, 185
12. Jackson, *Works*, Volume II, 37
13. G.A.Smith, *History of Wesleyan Methodism*, Volume II (1858), 419
14. At Tuckingmill, Cornwall, there were 453 society members distributed among eleven classes, two of which were in Tuckingmill, and the other nine in outlying villages. Of these nine classes only one did not become an independent society with its own chapel. G.C.Probert, *The Sociology of Cornish Methodism* (1971), 20
15. J.Everett, *Wesleyan Methodism in Manchester and Its Vicinity*, Volume 1 (1827), 63-64
16. Quoted J.S.Simon, *John Wesley and The Methodist Societies* (1937), 238
17. W.D.Lawson, *Wesleyan Methodist Local Preachers* (1873), 315 [also E.A.Rose. *Methodism in Ashton-under-Lyne*, Volume 1 1740-1787 (1967), 17]
18. J.Dunstan, "Billy and Alice Brammah, Partners in Ministry." *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Volume XXXVI Part 6 (1968), 173
19. L.F.Church, *More About the Early Methodist..* (1949), 245
20. A.Stevens, *The History of the Religious Movement of the Eighteenth Century called Methodism*, Volume II (edited by W. Willey 1863), 334
21. L.Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, Volume II (1876), 434
22. Ibid., 435
23. M.Batty, *Stages in the Development and Control of Wesleyan Lay Leadership 1791-1878* (1988), 60
24. T.P.Bunting, *The Life of Jabez Bunting, D.D.* (1887), 55
25. Church, *More About The Early Methodist..* 247
26. *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* 1827, 148 where it says that David Stoner "could not endure anyone to stamp the foot, or strike a table or form with the hand."
27. W.Clowes, *The Journals of William Clowes: A Primitive Methodist Preacher* (1844. Reprinted 1980), 44
28. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters*, 51-52
29. J.Telford, editor, *Letters of John Wesley*, Volume VIII (1931) 236-237
30. Ibid., 182. Thus Margaret Brigg of Bradley, together with two other persons, found peace with God in September 1777 at a prayer meeting which lasted several hours. [*Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* 1828, 496]
31. Telford, *Letters*, Volume VII, 162
32. Ibid., 324
33. Jackson, *Works*, Volume IV, 48
34. *Methodist Magazine* 1806, 534
35. Ibid., 538
36. T.Jackson, *The Early Methodist Preachers*, Volume 5, (1871) 61-62
37. J.S.Werner. *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History.* (Wisconsin, 1984), 25-29. Also: James Vickers. *History of Independent Methodism* (1920), 8-16; Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters*, 205-208.

38. *Methodist Recorder* Winter Number 1900, 68

39. People who were not members but interested in becoming so were allowed to attend three society meetings before having to make up their minds. John Pawson was at Wednesbury in 1768. Sarah Hall of nearby Tividale was persuaded by a neighbour to go and hear him preach. At the close of the service Pawson extended the usual invitation for "the Society to stop after the congregation was dismissed, and at the same time gave liberty for any serious person to enjoy the privilege." Sarah Hall accepted the invitation "and her allegiance to Methodism was won by what she heard in that Society meeting." [*Methodist Magazine* 1811, 430] The ruling could be applied insensitively at times. At Leeds, in 1758, Henry Crooke, the curate of Hunslet, went to hear Wesley preach and was stunned when "He discharged any of the congregation from the Society Meeting except those who were in Connexion with Him, notwithstanding the Experiences they might have of God's Love in their Souls. I think that savours too much of bigotry." P.S. Forsaith, *A Kindled Fire: John and Charles Wesley and the Methodist Revival in the Leeds Area* (1988), 9

40. R. Leese, "The Impact of Methodism on Black Country Society 1742-1860" (Manchester University. Ph.D thesis 1972), 74-75

41. Jackson, *Early Methodist Preachers, Volume II*, 179

42. *Ibid.*, 180-181

43. Telford, *Letters*, Volume V, 116 & John Dunstan, "Billy and Alice Brammah, Partners in Ministry." *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* Volume XXXVI, 175

44. *Arminian Magazine* 1794, 603 [When Conference prohibited women from public preaching in 1803, conducting after service prayer meetings gave some ministers' wives the opportunity to carry on a ministry of preaching in another guise. Mary Holder was one wife whose method "was to give a word of exhortation after my dear husband had finished his sermon, or to pray as I felt led by the spirit of God." [Z. Taft, *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of various Holy Women* Volume 1 (1876 reprint 1992), 147] Mrs Hainsworth was another wife of a Travelling Preacher who accompanied her husband to the country places where the novelty of a woman preaching and praying "excited considerable attention."⁶ It was the people and their prayer leaders who adopted the method enthusiastically and turned the mass hysteria of passive revivalism into impromptu after service prayer meetings. [Taft, *Holy Women*, Volume I, 226]

45. He was the son of a Godly farmer in the Fylde of Lancashire who regarded Methodism as being "a despicable community." Bramwell, himself, was an austere and melancholy person who was troubled from childhood by a sense of sin. It was among the despised Methodists that he found peace of mind whilst listening to John Wesley. After a very successful spell as a class-leader and local preacher at Preston, he entered the ranks of the itinerant ministry in 1785. [Stevens, *History of Methodism*, Volume II, 245]

46. J. Sigston, *Memoir of The Venerable William Bramwell* (1860), 127 Bramwell's prolonged, vocal, impassioned prayer for revival was known as 'The Prayer of Faith' and was a revival of the practice of prayer adopted by the Scottish Evangelical revivalists James Robe, William McCulloch, John McLaurin and John Erskine. In 1744 they called for a 'Concert of Prayer' whereby ministers and people on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean would covenant with each other to pray for the revival of religion in order to hasten the coming of God's Kingdom. [R.B. Steele, "Gracious Affection" and "True Virtue" According to Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley (Scarecrow Press, 1995), 150] "God is," proclaimed Jonathan Edwards, "... at the command of the prayer of faith; and in this respect is, as it were, under the power of his people." As W.R. Ward says: "The revival of the work of God, the great objective of the new prayer, was put squarely into the hands of the praying faithful." [W.R. Ward, *Faith and Faction* (1993), 210] Its adoption by Methodism, and its use of the Prayer of Faith was an expression of the extent to which Methodism had become infected with the prevailing millenarian beliefs of the age brought to fever pitch by the triumph of the French Revolution in overthrowing an order of society which had seemed immutable. Wesley himself was caught up in the general excitement. In 1789 he wrote to Thomas Morrell in America: "You give me a very agreeable account of the progress of the gospel in America. One would hope the time is approaching when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. Indeed, the amazing revolutions which have [been in] Europe seem to be the forerunners of the same grand event." [Telford, *Letters*, Volume VIII (1931), 199-200] William Bramwell, on hearing of the Austrian defeat at Wagram, and of the imprisonment of the Pope in France, wrote in 1807: "The powers of heaven are shaken. The inquisition, feudal system, nunneries, devils, coming down. Glory! Glory! Christ will come; he will reign triumphant. We may see it when we are in heaven, if not before." [T. Harris, *A Memoir of the Rev. William Bramwell* (1870), 183]

47. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters* (Princeton 1985), 57

48. Stevens, *History of Methodism*, Volume II, 86 & Taft, *Holy Women*, Volume I, 313-31

49. *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* 1829, 147

50. Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion*, 40-42

51. Sigston, *Bramwell*, 40-41
52. Ibid., 144
53. *Methodist Magazine* 1798, 243-244. The regulations were part of an article entitled 'Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in the Prayer Meetings' by 'A Well Wisher to Zion' Since they are similar to less detailed regulations given in C.W.Andrew's memoir of Bramwell it would appear that Bramwell (rather than someone like Alexander Mather) was the author.
54. Sigston, *Bramwell*, 105
55. Jackson, *Works*, Volume IV, 78
56. *Methodist Magazine* 1819, 392
57. S.Hulme et al, *The Jubilee of the Methodist New Connexion* (1848), 104-105
58. C.Dews, *Oxford Place Methodist Centre 1835-1985* (1985), 5
59. Batty, *Stages in the Development And Control ...*, 211-214
60. Smith, *Wesleyan Methodism*, Volume II, 422
61. F.Hockin, *John Wesley and Modern Methodism* (1887), 155
62. Stevens, *History of Methodism*, Volume III, 155-157
63. H.B.Kendall, *History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (1919 revised edition of 1902), 16
64. The reason for Bourne's loss of membership was given to him in a private conversation with the superintendent minister of the Burslem circuit. In answer to the question "Why did you put me out?" The reply was "Because you have a tendency to set up other than the ordinary worship." [Kendall, 20]
65. W.E.Farndale, *The Secret of Mow Cop* (Wesley Historical Society lecture for 1950) , 41
66. The name was taken from John Wesley's farewell address to the preachers of the Chester Circuit. Wesley, according to Crawford, concluded with the words: "Mr. Chairman, if you have deviated from the old usages, I have not; I still remain a primitive Methodist." Kendall, *History of the Primitive Methodist Church*, 29.
67. Farndale, *Secret of Mow Cop*, 68
68. Ibid., 19
69. Kendall, *Primitive Methodist Church*, 15-16
70. Quoted Davies et al, *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Volume IV (1986), 316-318
71. H.Bourne, "History of the Primitive Methodists" in *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1822, 174
72. J.Kent, *Holding The Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism* (1978), 54-55
73. H.Bourne, "...Primitive Methodists", *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1822, 171
74. Davies et al, *History of Methodist Church*, Volume IV, 416
75. *Methodist Magazine* 1803, 82-96, 269-279. In his discussion of the origin and nature of camp-meetings Iain Murray [Revival and Revivalism, (1994), 145-190] says that the term "general camp meeting" was adopted to describe Presbyterian communion camp meetings that became interdenominational in character.
76. L.E.Schmidt, *The Holy Fair: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton, 1989), 68
77. J.B.Boles, *The Great Revival 1787-1805* (Kentucky, 1972), 56
78. R.E.Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Indiana University Press, 1991), 22
79. Kent, *Holding the Fort*, 54
80. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1847, 526
81. B.Crofts, editor, *At Satan's Throne. The Story of Methodism in Bath* (1990), 68-69
82. W.R.Cross, *The Burned-Over District. The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (New York, 1981), 183
83. R.Carwardine, *Trans-atlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America 1790-1865* (Greenwood 1972), 111 [As a result of the revival meetings held in Leeds between the second week of May 1843 and the second week of July 1843 the four Wesleyan circuits gained 529 new members. Between 1840-1843 they had lost about 500 members between them. Caughey's ministry had succeeded in reversing the downward trend of the preceding three years, and in making good the number of members lost. The figures are given in James Caughey, *Caughey's Letters*, Volume 2 (1845), 234-235]
84. Ibid., 120
85. John Unwin, *Selections from the Journal of the Rev. James Caughey* (1857), 154
86. Ibid., 119
87. W.R.Ward, *Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1830-1858* (1976), 340
88. J.Kent, "The Wesleyan Methodists to 1849" in Davies et al, *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Volume 2 (1978), 234

89. J.Caughey, *Caughey's Letters*, Volume 2 (1845), 329
90. R.Chew, *James Everett: A Biography* (1875), 64
91. Bunting, *Jabez Bunting*, 97
92. Stevens, *History of Methodism*, Volume III, 187
93. A.W.Harrison, et al, *The Methodist Church: Its Origin, Divisions, and Reunion* (1932), 64
94. "It is well known.. that every Pastor appointed by the Conference has to undergo an examination, twice every year,- at the District-Meeting and Conference-as to his moral character, belief of our doctrines, approval of our discipline, and his ability for the pastoral work... and on a satisfactory answer to such questions, depends the power of the Conference to appoint to the occupancy of the pulpits. But in Mr.Caughey's case no such questions can be put: he is accountable to no tribunal!" [W.Vevers, *Wesleyan Methodism Vindicated and The "Christian Witness" Refuted in two letters addressed to the Editor.* (1847) 21-22]
95. S.Colley, *The Life of the Rev. Thos. Collins* (1863), 264 [The banishment of Caughey seems to have brought the simmering discontent of the Revivalists to a head for in 1846 the first of the anonymous "Fly-sheets" appeared which led to the great disruption of 1851-1854 when Wesleyan Methodism, according to Benjamin Gregory, lost a third of its membership. (B.Gregory, *Sidelights on the Conflicts of Methodism* (1892), 494) The work of Jabez Bunting survived the hurricane. As Elsie Harrison so eloquently pointed out by building on the foundation of voluntary loyalty given to Wesley by the preceding generations of Methodist Preachers "He concentrated on the creation of a powerful Conference and the elevation of the Pastoral Office. He shaped and welded, chastised and browbeat his brethren in order to obtain a company of officers utterly loyal to Methodism and the Kingdom of God." (E.Harrison, *Methodist Good Companions* (1935), 59) Thomas Collins voted against the Conference resolution calling for the recall of James Caughey, but when the vote went against him he said:" Because the majority decide what does not please me, should I impute ill motives to them?- Where then is my charity? Am I to allow my mind to brood over the disliked result, taking no note of any marks of moderation in the method?- Where then is my candour? Am I, so soon as my private will is thwarted, to turn rebel?- Where then is my submission?- Where my loyalty? How, if such conduct were common, could any church hold together?" (Colley, *Life of Collins*, 265)
96. Stevens, *History of Methodism*, Volume III, 183-184
97. Colley, *Life of Collins*, 248
98. H.D.Rack, "Wesleyan Methodism 1849-1902" in Davies et al, *History of Methodism in Great Britain*, Volume 3 (1983), 126
99. J.Dixon, *A Preacher's Half Century* (1917), 122
100. H.T.Smart, *Thomas Cook's Early Ministry* (1892), 75
101. Ibid., 74
102. Ibid., 117-118
103. H.B.Kendall, *History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (1919), 68
104. In 1861 The Primitive Methodist Conference directed circuits not to employ "revivalists so called." Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 397
105. W.J.Robson, *Silsden Primitive Methodism* (1910), 253
106. J.Travis, *Seventy-Five Years* (1914), 20
107. Ibid., 51
108. S.Mews, "Against the Simple Gospel: John Day Thompson and the New Evangelism in Primitive Methodism." in S.Mews, editor, *Modern Religious Rebels* (1993), 210 [Primitive Methodism seems to have been following the trend of Methodist Holiness Movements in North America where the holiness camp-meeting became holiday resort cum spiritual renewal social event for middle class, respectable America. Charles Edwin Jones. *Perfectionist Persuasion: The Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1867-1936* (Scarecrow, 1974), 16-46]
109. W.S.Allen, *Revivalism* (nd), 19-20
110. J.Stephenson, *The Man of Faith and Fire or, The Life and Work of the Rev. G. Warner* (1902), 47
111. W.Carvosso, *A Memoir of Mr. William Carvosso* (abridged version, 1884), 7
112. *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, 1847, 391
113. Ibid., 27-28
114. Sermon LXXXIII in Jackson, *Works*, Volume VI, 464-466
115. Jackson, *Works*, Volume VIII, 279
116. J.F.C.Harrison, *The Common People* (1984), 284-285. Illustrated by the experience of Margaret Adams. She was twenty-one years of age when she was caught up in the excitement of a Wesleyan after service revival prayer-meeting: "there was a great work among the people; many were crying out for mercy; and the Lord's

people were earnestly engaged in prayer, and very often broke out in singing, 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow;' I saw no confusion in the matter, I concluded that sinners were repenting of their sins, as I ought to do; and the people of God were so anxious for them to be saved, and these things caused them to rejoice. I longed for repentance more than ever I did for anything in my life, but I felt great hardness of heart; but while I was looking to Christ, the mighty power of God fell upon me in an instant. I fell to the ground like one dead. I believe I lost my sense for a season, but when I recovered the dear friends were praying with me, and I was trembling and weeping most bitterly. It pleased the Lord in about two hours to speak peace to my soul; I arose from my knees, and praised God for that opportunity." [Z.Taft, *Biographical Sketches...*, Volume 1, 148]

117. J.G.Mantle, *Hugh Price Hughes: A Strenuous Life* (1903), 51

118. Carwardine, 185

119. Mantle, *Hugh Price Hughes*, 53

Chapter Four

THE CHASE FOR COAL

The industrial development of Cannock Chase 1776-1893

There is no major academic study of the industrial history of the Cannock Chase region. M.J.Wise's chapter on "The Cannock Chase Region" in *Birmingham and Its Regional Setting*, published in 1951 stands alone as the only serious academic treatment of the subject in a minor vein. C.M.Peel's presidential address to the Institute of Mining Engineers on the "History of Coalmining in Cannock Chase" also delivered in 1951 is only one of a number of sketchy outline treatments of the history of mining on the Chase beginning with W.Molyneux's articles in the *Railway and Commercial Gazette* of 1863 on "Cannock Chase and Its Coalmines"; continuing with F.W.Hackwood's chapter on "The Development of the Cannock Chase Coalfield" in his book, *The Chronicles of Cannock Chase* published in 1912, and culminating with A.J.Taylor's "The Staffordshire Coal Industry" in Volume II of the *Victoria County History of Staffordshire* published in 1967. Excellent academic treatments of various aspects of the industrial history of the Chase have been produced by S.Belcher on "The Provision of Miners' Housing in the Central Part of the Cannock Chase Coalfield: 1850-1914", D.G.Brown on "The Economic Development of the Marquis of Anglesey's Estates 1842-91", E.R.Chimelewski on "The Household Structure of Pelsall 1841-81", and M.E.Mills on "Women, Family and Community on the Cannock Chase Coalfield.". The Chase has not been lacking in local historians and they have produced a series of local histories and studies of individual collieries and manufactories. Meshak Wright's excellent reporting on the district for the *Express and Star* in the 1920s and 1930s under the pseudonym "Pitman", Edward Homeshaw's work on

Great Wyrley and the edgetool industry at Churchbridge in the 1950s; and J.R.Francis on the history of the Cannock Chase Colliery Company, Ray Shill on the history of the Pelsall Iron Works, Jim Evans on Essington, and E.O'Donnell on Chasetown and Heath Hayes are all valuable additions to the industrial and social history of the Chase. As Roy Church discovered in his study of the British coal industry in the Victorian era all study of the industrial history of the Chase is handicapped by the loss of many of the relevant documents.

Since the primary aim of this chapter is to describe the development and expansion of the Cannock Chase coalfield, the problem was which criteria to employ in tracing the growth of the coalfield. Roy Church, discussing the growth of Victorian industry between 1825 and 1875, suggested that the dynamics of industrial growth can be assessed in terms of rising investment, production, profit, and technical innovation. He seems to think that innovation is the key element in growth because it reduces labour costs and is indicative of the enterprise needed to create healthy industrial development - especially when competition is keen and profits small. "The mechanism which generated rapid growth industrial growth" he says, "was that triggered by relatively modest unit profits and less than impressive rates of return on capital within a highly competitive industrial structure."¹ In the words of the West Point motto, "When the going gets tough the tough get going." The criteria mentioned by Church with his emphasis on the central importance of the human factor were to be found in W.W.Rostow's celebrated model of the stages of industrial growth. It is the first two stages of his model relating to traditional societies and societies in the process of transition which are most relevant to the development of the Cannock Chase coalfield between 1776 and 1893. For Rostow a traditional society is one which remains "untouched or unmoved by man's new capability for regularly manipulating

his environment to his economic advantage.."2 Such a society is characterized by: a hierarchical social system reflecting the central importance of agriculture and land ownership, the limits to the level of attainable output a head and to the extent to which an individual could improve his lot in life, the important role of family connections in social organization. A society in process of transition is one which has accepted the idea that economic progress is possible and beneficial and mobilizes capital for taking risks in the pursuit of profit. It is characterized by: new types of enterprising men, banks and other institutions for mobilizing capital, an increase in investment in transport, communications and raw materials, a widening of the scope of both internal and external commerce, and the limited introduction of manufacturing innovation. "...all this activity," says Rostow, "proceeds at a limited pace within an economy and society still mainly characterized by traditional low productivity methods, by the old social structures and values.."3

According to this analysis the Cannock Chase coalfield entered its economic lift off phase somewhere in the 1850s. The date chosen is 1854 with the appearance of J.R.McClean and his purchase of the Hammerwich Colliery from the Marquis of Anglesey.

2. The Nature of the Cannock Chase Coalfield.

The middle coal measures of the South Staffordshire coalfield were known in the nineteenth century to stretch for fifteen miles from Stourbridge in the south to Brereton in the north. The exposed portion of the coalfield, lying at depths of a hundred to six hundred feet below the ground, formed the rough shape of a tongue. The tip of the tongue began its inward curves towards its apex at Brereton from Essington in the south-east, and from Pelsall in the south-west.⁴ It was this northern tip of the tongue which formed the Cannock Chase coalfield. The southern portion of the tongue has gone down in history as "*The Black Country*". Until 1873 the Cannock Chase portion was considered part of the South

Staffordshire coalfield. In that year an Act of Parliament established the South Staffordshire Mines Drainage Commission. When this commission decided that the portion of the coalfield lying north of the Bentley Fault should not come within the sphere of its operations the distinct identity of the Cannock Chase coalfield was formally established.⁵

The Bentley fault ran on a line south of Essington in the west, and Rushall in the east. This fault totally altered the character of the middle coal measures, and helped to give the Cannock Chase coalfield its distinctive character. The measures consisted of some twelve to fifteen different seams of coal. South of the Bentley fault these seams were so tightly compressed together that they formed virtually one bed of coal thirty feet thick. This seam of "*thick coal*" was the richest coal seam in the whole country. It outcropped close to the surface over wide areas, especially in a wide arc stretching from Dudley, through Tipton and Coseley, to Bilston where it turned eastwards, and then southwards, towards Wednesbury.⁶ North of the Bentley Fault the seams of coal were thrown more widely apart to form distinct beds of "*thin coal*"; of which the most productive were the "*Deep*", "*Shallow*", "*Eight Feet*", "*Park*", and "*Brooch*". Some of these seams outcropped close to the surface in scattered pockets at Essington, Pelsall, Brownhills, Great Wyrley, and Brereton. For the most part the occurrence of several other fault lines within the region threw the seams down to depths of hundreds of feet running to the north or to the west. The existence and location of the coal seams in the Cannock Chase area were always, therefore, more costly to prove and to win than in the Black Country.⁷

Because Cannock Chase was regarded as an integral part of the South Staffordshire Coalfield speculators always entertained the exaggerated hope that the region would become as populous, industrialised, and wealthy as its Black Country neighbour. The cutting of the Wyrley-Essington canal in the southern base of the coalfield around

Essington, Pelsall, and Brownhills evoked the following comment from the engineer John Carey: "Coals- the whole country being full of that article of a very good quality and abounding on the banks of the canal nearly the whole extent."⁸ Another engineer, William Pitt, said of the whole region: "It was calculated, about the year 1800, that the whole coal land of this district was 40,000 acres, and that the consumption from the beginning had not been more than a tenth of the whole."⁹ Pitt wrote these words in his *Topographical History of Staffordshire* published in 1818. A journalist of the *Colliery Guardian* writing in January 1873 struck the same note of optimism regarding the vast, untapped resources of the coalfield when he said: " Judging from present appearances, it is not by any means improbable that in another half century the quaint little town of Cannock will be the teeming metropolis of a Black Country as large and industrious as that of which Dudley is now the centre. Already, in what is known as the Cannock Chase district, the area of mineral ground which has been proved exceeds twenty square miles, and new enterprises for developing the wealth of this large tract are either in progress or about to be launched by private joint-stock companies formed for the purpose."¹⁰

The Cannock Chase coalfield did not become another *Black Country*, and Cannock itself merely grew from being a small into a medium sized industrial town of some 35,000 inhabitants by 1926. The principal reason was that the Cannock Chase coalfield remained primarily a coal producing area - and not an iron manufacturing one. The *Thick Coal* of the *Black Country* rested upon productive beds of fire-clay (used for lining furnaces) and of ironstone. Limestone to provide flux for smelting was found at the Dudley Castle and Wren's Nest hills. Moulding sand was found on the western fringe of the *Black Country*. As a result more than one mineral was sent up the same shaft of a *Black Country* pit to be used in the production of pig iron. In the peak year of 1873 the *Black Country* pits

produced 10 million tons of coal, and over 786,000 tonnes of ironstone which was converted by *Black Country* furnaces into 700,000 tons of pig iron. Unfortunately for the aspirations of the Cannock Chase coalfield its coal was more suitable for domestic, rather than industrial, use. As W.E. Harrison, the leading coal producer on the Chase, pointed out to the Coal Commission meeting in London early in 1926, the market for Chase coal was limited because they did not produce either gas or coking coal. What they did produce was very fine house coal for domestic consumers, fairly good steam coal for use by the railways, and quite good forge coal for industrial use. Ironstone was mined in any quantity only at Hednesford. This was the Gibbon Ironstone measure which yielded 12 cwts of iron to the square yard, and was accompanied by an 8 foot seam of very good fireclay.¹¹ Thus, there was limited production and manufacture of pig iron on the coalfield: William Gilpin established a mining, smelting, and edgetool manufacturing complex at Wedges Mills and Churchbridge from 1797 onwards; there was the Pelsall Iron and Coal Company from 1832 onwards; the Cannock Foundry and Engineering Works was established by Samuel Jellyman in 1861; and the Cannock Chase Foundry was established at Hednesford by Bradley (later giving way to Bumstead) and Chandler in 1872. None of these concerns, however, could rival in size and output the integrated ironworks of Hingley's at Netherton (established in 1838 and employing some 3,000 men), the Woodside Ironworks (opened in 1841 and employing over 1,000 men), or The Earl of Dudley's Round Oak Ironworks at Brierley Hill (opened in 1855).¹²

3. An Industrial Frontier Region 1776-1853

There is a long history of coalmining on Cannock Chase. The earliest recorded reference goes back to 1298 when it is stated that coal was obtained on the Bishop of Lichfield's manor at Cannock. Sea coal (as distinct from charcoal) was being mined in the Bishop of

Lichfield's park at Beaudesert in 1367. Over a hundred years later, in 1497, three men were leasing a coalmine in the same park for eight years at a rent of £1 for the first year, and £1.6s.2d for the succeeding seven years. They also leased a parcel of ground for the use of their horses at 5 pence per annum.¹³ There is evidence from the seventeenth century of widespread, though limited, mining of coal. Wooden sleighs and a wooden pick with a metal tip were discovered in some old mine workings at Pelsall.¹⁴ A wooden basket tub with wooden wheels discovered at Essington is dated 1650.¹⁵ Thomas Leveson secured the right to work coal and lead mines at Cheslyn Hay in 1636.¹⁶ Daniel Hawthorne mined land in the vicinity of Warwell Lane at Landywood profitably for many years until his death in 1755.¹⁷

This long tradition of coalmining was due, initially, to the way in which the coal seams outcropped near enough to the surface to be discovered and to be mined easily. Robert Plot described the two main methods of discovering the presence of coal in his book *The Natural History of Staffordshire* published in 1686: "they first consult the springs if any near, to see if they can find any coal water i.e. an acid water having a.. yellow sediment: above ground they look for a smut as they call it, i.e. a friable black earth: when they meet with either of these they reckon themselves under circumstances tolerably good for the finding of coal..¹⁸ The coal was usually mined by means of small, shallow, bell pits which were five to six feet across, and broadened out to a diameter of twelve feet at a depth of ten feet. Three or four men were sufficient to work such a pit. The seventeenth century traveller, Celia Fiennes, observed of such pits that "they draw up the coale in baskets with a little wheel or windlass like a well."¹⁹ When one shaft was cleared of coal, or drowned out by the surface water, another was excavated close by. The relatively inexpensive, small scale, dispersed character of the mining carried on at Beaudesert,

Pelsall, Essington, Cheslyn Hay and Landywood was indicative of the frontier character of the industrial development of Cannock Chase.²⁰ The northern edge of the Chase overlooking the valley of the River Trent between Rugeley and Brereton was in a more advanced stage of development in keeping with the national stage of industrial development than the rest of the region which is why this section has been headed as a "frontier region" rather than a "traditional society" in Rostow's terminology. In 1772 the Trent and Mersey canal arrived in the vicinity of Rugeley. At this time Rugeley was "a handsome clean well-built town of exceeding pleasant and healthful situation"²¹ renowned for its fair in saddle horses. The arrival of a canal like the Trent and Mersey designed to be an artery of industrial life could have a novel effect upon a traditional community like Rugeley set in a backward and undeveloped part of England. Apart from the physical presence of a wharf and warehouse it could stimulate the growth of the existing population, industries and general trade of the town and lead to the introduction of new industries.²² The population of Rugeley seems to have grown steadily and the growth of the hat manufacturing industry attracted new people into the town.²³ The growing regional importance of the town is shown by the building of a prison in 1774, and a workhouse in 1780. Ominously for the future pleasant and healthful situation of the town a forge was erected in 1775.²⁴ A wharf was constructed and a large warehouse built for the storage of the wide variety of goods carried on the canal such as "Staffordshire pottery, coal, iron, stone, limestone and merchandise." The arrival of the canal certainly stimulated the existing coal industry because in 1791 the Earl of Shrewsbury leased his mineral rights at Brereton to four Shropshire gentlemen. In 1797 they advertised their lease for sale. Their mining operations consisted of ten shafts sunk to an average depth of thirty yards, twenty six dwelling houses for workmen, offices, weighing machine, blacksmith's shop and a stable, and six gins

complete with ropes. The coal works were favourable for sale "having good roads to it, and not more than one mile distant from the Grand Trunk Canal."²⁵

The mines were taken over by the Brereton Colliery Company who negotiated a new lease in 1806 and built a tramway down the escarpment to the canal by 1815.²⁶ By contrast the mining operations of the Pagets at Beaudesert Park were in decline. In 1749 the collieries at Beaudesert yielded a profit of £351.0.0 on coal that cost £628.0.0. to mine. In 1804 they yielded a profit of £717.0.0 on coal that cost £4,045 to mine.²⁷ In 1816 these pits were closed down: "The greater part of the material so used was taken to Brereton, and re-erected on some of the old shallow works adjoining works established many years by Lord Talbot. In 1854 these restored mines were leased to this nobleman..."²⁸ Here are the increases of investment in transport, communications and raw materials, the expanding scope of external commerce, and the diversification of industries within the context of a society that still possesses the traditional hierarchical structure but which has accepted the goal of profit, which are some of the marks of a society in process of transition in the lift off phase of industrial growth

At the other end of the Chase Henry Vernon seems to have been in financial difficulties. His marriage to Penelope Graham of Hockley Lodge, County Armagh in 1775 was reputed to have brought him a fortune of £60,000, but in 1789 he appears to have been bankrupt with his lands in the possession of James Horden of Shareshill who was in business as a banker at Wolverhampton.²⁹ Vernon had some coalmines on his estate at Essington which supplied coals for the local market. A local historian of Shenstone at this period observed that the use of peat as a fuel had dropped out of favour since there was plenty of coal to be found 4 miles away "at Brownhills on Cannock. Good coal are also brought from the works of - Hussey, of Little Wyrley, Esq., -Vernon, of Hilton, Esq.,

Essington Wood and Wednesbury; which being tolerably cheap, there is less occasion for peat as fuel, though it might be got in plenty on Sutton Park."³⁰ Like other landowners in similar difficulties at that time Vernon sought an opportunity to rebuild his fortunes by opening the produce of his pits at Essington to the wider domestic market of the rapidly expanding population of the Black Country and Birmingham (whose population grew from 15,000 in 1700 to 70,000 in 1800). The businessmen of Wolverhampton were also facing problems. In 1772 the Birmingham Canal had linked Wolverhampton to Birmingham, and a wharf had been constructed at Autherly on the Worcestershire and Staffordshire Canal. In 1785 the Dudley Canal had been extended to the Birmingham Canal at Tipton Green "which cut out the necessity of sending goods from Birmingham and the southern part of the coalfield via Autherley at all."³¹ In 1790 it was being proposed to construct a Worcester and Birmingham Canal that would divert the Birmingham - Severn traffic away from the Birmingham Canal altogether.³² In 1791 Vernon joined forces with Horden, and two Wolverhampton solicitors - Chrees and Wightwick - to propose a scheme in the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* of August 10, 1791: "for the making of a navigable canal from or near Wyrley, in the County of Stafford, through the several townships of Wyrley, Bushbury, Bentley, Walsall and Wolverhampton, in the same county, to communicate with the present Birmingham Canal at or near the town of Wolverhampton."³³

Royal Assent for the construction of the canal was given on April 30, 1792. This was the period of the "*canal mania*" when one third of the 165 Canal Acts passed by Parliament between 1758 and 1802 took effect in the years 1792-1795. The first meeting of The Wyrley and Essington Navigation Company was held in the following month of May. Thomas Wightwick was elected the secretary. Forty-seven people committed themselves to raising the £25,000 required by pledging to buy between them 200 shares at £125 each at

an initial outlay of £10 each. Work on the cutting of the canal began in the late summer of 1792 preceded by an advertisement for a number of cutters - and a brickmaker "that can make 500,000 or a million bricks."³⁴

This project , according to some historians, "marked the beginning of the modern development of Cannock Chase."³⁵ It would not have done so if the original project had been carried out for Vernon, and fellow minor landowners like Pulteney, Anson, and Ashmore who owned coalpits at Wednesfield and Birchills, were only concerned with developing their own limited local interests by linking their coalpits to the Birmingham Canal. The original purpose, therefore, was to cut a line from Horseley Fields on the Birmingham Canal to Sneyd, near Bloxwich. From there one branch was to run up to Wyrley Bank (later known as Cheslyn Hay) where Vernon's coalpits were located, and another branch down to Birchills on the very edge of Walsall. It was the intention of the canal to "open a communication with several mines of coal, limestone and other minerals", and to "render the conveyance of coal, corn, ironstone, limestone, and other produce less expensive" This justification for the cutting of the canal was a concession to the dominant landowning interest in Parliament who had not yet reached Rostow's political criteria for the stage of economic take off which required politicians to take seriously the need to modernize the economy.³⁶ Other landowners, however, wanted to become involved in the project. Phineas Hussey, of Little Wyrley, had limestone beds at Lord Hayes, and coal pits at Pelsall and Brownhills. It was left to the experienced merchants and industrialists of Walsall to exploit the wider commercial possibilities of the canal. At the third General meeting of the company in 1794 it was decided to extend the line of the canal from Bloxwich, past Lichfield, to Huddlesford on the Coventry Canal in order to link up with the Grand Trunk Canal and the opportunities offered by the link of trade with London and

Hull. The detours of the extended line would take in Pelsall and Brownhills. Branches would be cut to the limestone works at Daw End (near Rushall) and to Lord Hayes (to the north of Bloxwich). Work on this extended line went ahead with indecent haste compared with the attention given to completing the original line to Wyrley Bank. The junction with Huddleston was completed on May 8, 1797. The branch line to Birchills was completed by 1798; and the ones to Daw End and to Lord Hayes by 1800. It was the northern fringe of the Black Country coalfield which benefitted greatly: "Round Bloxwich the collieries and limestone quarries were developed, and local industries of bit-making, lock-smithing and tack-making were benefited. The Gosgote ironworks were established, and fuel from Gosgote and other collieries to the Sneyd brick kilns meant that bricks could be made in large quantities for the new housing required in Walsall."³⁷

The one person who did not benefit was Henry Vernon. The extension from Bloxwich to Vernon's mines at Essington- a mere one-and-a-half miles- was not completed until the July of 1798. The remainder of the original line to Wyrley Bank was not cut until 1857 - and this was the work of the *Birmingham Navigation Company* with whom the *Wyrley and Essington Navigation Company* had amalgamated in 1840! Vernon must have been feeling angry and frustrated. In conjunction with his plan to cut a canal to his coalpits at Essington he had applied for an Act of Enclosure of the waste at Wyrley Bank with plans to develop the roads out of the area to Wolverhampton, Cannock, and the surrounding district. Although the Act of Enclosure was obtained in 1792, it was not put into effect until 1797. And then some of his own miners who had squatted on the waste in the time honoured custom of such workers refused to be resettled.³⁸ The legal battles dragged on into the next century, and were finally decided in favour of the squatters in 1818.³⁹ The proposed

extension may have been delayed both by the slowness of the Enclosure Act to take effect, and by Vernon's inability to meet his financial commitments to the Company. In any case, Vernon seems to have decided that enough was enough for in 1798 he petitioned Parliament for leave to build either a road or a tramway from his mines to Penkridge on the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal. His petition stirred up a hornet's nest of opposition. The landowners on the proposed route of the road or tramway opposed the idea, as did the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company. The main opponents were Vernon's fellow shareholders. They argued that the canal had been constructed on the assurance that it would carry Vernon's coal. Early in 1799 the bailiffs and citizens of Lichfield joined in the furore by pointing out that they had provided a free wharf to enable cheap coal to be made available at Lichfield. If Vernon was allowed to sell his coal away from the canal, then the price of coal would rise in Lichfield. On February 12, 1799, Vernon's Bill before Parliament was ordered to be postponed for six months, and nothing more was heard of it since Vernon and his fellow shareholders came to a private agreement. Having spent £3,000 on opposing his petition, Vernon's Company was anxious to placate him. To this end a tramway was speedily built to link up his mines with the canal, and promises were made to cut the remaining mile-and-a-half of canal in the direction of Wyrley Bank.

Despite the diversion of the canal to the Walsall area to the initial benefit of the Black Country coalfield, the Wyrley and Essington Canal did signal the birth of the Cannock Chase coalfield, for it was instrumental in promoting the kind of integrated industrial manufacturing development on the Chase that was taking place in the Black Country. The man responsible for the development was a native of Wolverhampton by the name of William Gilpin. His speciality was the manufacture of a thin, broad, semi-cylindrical chisel

called a *shell-auger* used by the ship's carpenters of the Royal Navy. He learned his skill from a man called Daniel Fieldhouse of St. John's Street, Wolverhampton. Apparently Fieldhouse took Gilpin on as his apprentice in order to clear his slate at the Red Cow Inn where Gilpin's father was the licensed victualler. When Fieldhouse moved to London to work in the Royal Dockyards there, Gilpin went with him. On completing his apprenticeship, Gilpin returned to Wolverhampton where he set himself up in business using a makeshift little smithy in the backyard of his father's inn. He provided himself with the capital he needed by selling a sow and her litter given to him by his father. Business prospered. A helper was hired, and new premises acquired in the vicinity of what is now Piper's Row. Soon Gilpin had three hearths working.⁴⁰

The quality of Gilpin's tools was handicapped by the fact that he had to use a horse-gin to drive his grinding stone. Good quality metal, and care in honing the edge of his chisels, were not enough to guarantee the quality and effectiveness of his tools - a grindstone with a constant velocity was also needed. A water-mill was what Gilpin needed, and what he acquired with his marriage to Fanny Bradney in 1794. Her father owned a farm, land, and property at Wedges Mills, and as part of Fanny's dowry he gave Gilpin the cornmill he owned on the Riding Brook at Wedges Mills.⁴¹ The area already had an industrial history for iron smelting, leather and brick manufacturing had all been carried on in the locality of the deep, swiftly flowing stream at the beginning of the eighteenth century. When Gilpin arrived at Wedges Mills, he lacked the capital to convert the mill into a blade-grinding mill. What money he had was spent on building a house for himself, and on four hearths for his workmen. For some time he had to carry his augurs by pack-horse to the blades-mill at Bentley to be ground. The inconvenience did not last long for his father-in-law either lent or bequeathed to him the money he needed. With this capital Gilpin built a factory

consisting of a large work-shop equipped with the latest automatic, water-driven forge hammer. Not only did he manufacture augers, adzes, and other tools for ships' carpenters, but he also expanded his range of manufactures to include heavier edgetools like axes, billhooks, and hoes for work on plantations.⁴² Here, then, is the limited introduction of productive innovation associated with Rostow's traditional society stage of growth. Gilpin, at this stage of his career, also illustrates, indirectly, John Foster's claim that "the intending factory builder" of this period, "needed not just capital but the right kind in the right place. In particular he needed land and the resources that went with it."⁴³

Since there was a shortage of skilled workers in the locality, Gilpin went to established centres of edgetool manufacture at Coaley and Frenchay in Gloucestershire to recruit the labour he needed. There was a great deal of jealousy and rivalry between the local men and the migrants from Gloucestershire. According to romanticised local traditions it usually came to a head on Saturday afternoons when the wages were paid. The two local pubs did a roaring trade as the two groups of men vied with each other in who could drink the most without passing out. Gambling at cards and skittles created ill-feeling which was expressed in furious fist-fights outside kitchen doors, and the skittle alley.⁴⁴ Life in the workshops was equally as hard. Work began at five o'clock in the morning, and ended at six o'clock in the evening during the winter months -- and at eight in the evening during the summer. These hours did not include the time needed to prepare the iron bars for manufacture either before the day's work or after it had finished. Despite the automatic hammer, most of the work was done by hand. When a general labourer had exhausted his energy swinging the long, heavy sledge-hammer, he took a rest by pumping the bellows for the hearth. Supplies of coke had to be broken, sorted, and riddled upon the hearth during mealtimes. For all

this labour a workman was paid 16 shillings a week out of which he bought his own tools, and the wooden shafts for his hammers.⁴⁴

The arrival of the Wyrley and Essington canal at Newtown in 1798 turned Gilpin's attention towards the coal and ironstone to be found in the land at the head of the Wyrley Brook. Gilpin obtained the lease to mine the land for either ninety-nine years, or until the supply of minerals was exhausted. A tramway connected the mines to the canal wharf at Newtown. Gilpin built his own coal wharf at Churchbridge to supply the district with coal. As he prospered so Gilpin built another factory at Churchbridge - possibly in 1806.⁴⁵ By 1818 William Pitt could describe the industrial complex that Gilpin had created as "a considerable addition to the commercial and manufacturing interests of the county". Pitt went on to say: "The Wyrley Bank Colliery has been opened, worked by royalty, and raising 10,000 tons of coal annually, employs about thirty families. Attached is a manufactory employing about fifty workmen. The coals are conveyed on a railway, a considerable distance, to the turnpike road for sale and use. The manufactory consists of augers, and edge and plantation tools, which are now in full work, notwithstanding the depression of the times. The screw auger, a modern tool, is made in great perfection; it enters and perforates the hardest wood with facility without any preparation. A steam-mill is in full work at Church Bridge, in the manufactory, and a water-mill on the Hedgeford River, called Wedges Mills is also attached to it, and the whole appears as a thriving concern, established within about the last twenty years."⁴⁶ Gilpin is a significant figure in the history of the industrial development of Cannock Chase. He was the first of that breed of enterprising men needed to take advantages of developments in transport, productive innovations, and the availability of local raw material by risking their savings and capital in the pursuit of modernization and profits. He was typical of men of limited ambitions of the

traditional society in that he did not aspire to the status of the gentry for he did not invest in land and was content to be a prosperous industrialist. William Gilpin died a prosperous, secure, and respected man in 1835.

Edward John Littleton, the first Baron Hatherton, was highly respected but far from prosperous and secure in the 1830s. He was born Edward John Walhouse, but he changed his name to Littleton in 1812 when he inherited the estates of his grand-uncle, Sir Edward Littleton. Hatherton was a politician - he was M.P. for Stafford County between 1812 and 1835, and for South Staffordshire between 1832 and 1835. He played a prominent part in the passing of the Truck Act of 1831 which forbade paying workmen in goods that could only be obtained from company shops, rather than in money. He became the first Baron Hatherton in 1835.⁴⁷ To the considerable expense of being an M.P., he added the costs of maintaining a large house at Teddersley in which all the leading political figures of the day were guests at one time or another. His wife, Hyacinthe, was the niece of the Duke of Wellington who became a regular visitor to the Hall. Hatherton admitted ruefully that, "My living has been attempted on a scale to which my means have never been adequate."⁴⁸

The main source of his income was the rent from his estates. On succeeding to them in 1812 he carried on the improving policy of his grand-uncle, and set out to make his lands among the best in the country. He undertook a difficult task for Robert Plot regarded the land on Cannock Chase as a "heathy, broomy, gorsy, barren sort of soil, for the most part too.. a gravelly fast land, whence it is that in Cannock Wood and most of their parks, they have so pleasant and secure pursuit of their game."⁴⁹ William Pitt, however, regarded the northern and western ends of the Chase where Hatherton's estate was located as being "amongst the best of the whole walk of 25,000 acres. The soil sound, and of a pretty good staple, the herbage tolerably good in the open spaces, and less encumbered with heath and

rubbish than most other parts of the waste.. large tracts of land on the north and west parts of the waste consist of a good light soil adapted to turnip and barley agriculture."⁵⁰ Deep drainage to depths of between twelve to fourteen feet was the method used by Hatherton to make the best use of his lands. Said he: "I know no other pleasure so satisfactory as putting in good deep drainage. The benefits are immediate, as land is rendered more productive and a source of employment is provided for ages to come."⁵¹ By 1844 he had added 3,600 acres to the 8,000 he had inherited - but at a cost of £120,000. He thought the money well spent since the water drained off the land was used to drive cornmills which ground his wheat into flour. Since the dry, gravelly soil was suited for sheep, the other main source of income from his estate was from the sale of wool and mutton. In 1817 "the number of sheep kept this side of Cannock Chase" according to William Pitt, "is very considerable; the common being in many places perfectly whitened with them."⁵² The native breed of sheep - long and lean of leg and body, grey of face, and with hornless heads - was gradually supplanted by the South Devon breed, so that in 1845 Hatherton was moved to comment regretfully: "When I came to live at Teddersley thirty years ago, my tenants generally had Cank Wood flocks and long-horned cows. The mutton and wool were excellent and the carcasses small and unprofitable."

The income from the estate was so small and unprofitable in relation to his expenses that Hatherton considered selling the Estate in 1832. Like Vernon before him, however, he turned to developing the mineral resources beneath his land to make good his fortune. Early attempts to prove coal on his estate at Teddesley had been abortive for borings to depths of 117 feet had been unproductive. In 1832 he re-opened some mines at Rumer Hill, Cannock. They were worked until 1858 with a period of inactivity between 1839 and 1844 due to a dispute over the payment of royalties to the Marquess of Anglesey which

Hatherton lost. In a fit of pique he closed down the mines rather than pay the royalties!⁵³ As Chairman of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company he revived Vernon's plan to connect the coalmines at Wyrley Bank with Penkridge. Vernon's original plans were borrowed, preliminary surveys were carried out, construction on what known as the Hatherton Extension was begun in 1839, and completed in 1841.⁵⁴ Industries developed along the banks of the canal including a brick works owned by Hatherton, and a mine was leased at Long Houses in 1848 by the widow of Joseph Palmer to compensate for the loss of the lease of the Hayes Colliery at Brereton. The revenue from these and other ventures like ground rents from land for urban development at Walsall brought in a revenue of about £2,400 per annum.⁵⁵

With respect to the agricultural development of his estate through the expansion of acreage and the use of innovative methods Hatherton belongs to the traditional society stage of growth. The same was true of his motives for exploiting the economic resources of his estate for his concern was to increase his revenue to pay off his debts - not the modernization of society.

The other major impetus for the modern development of the coalfield was to come from the major landowner on the Chase - Lord Henry William Paget, the Marquis of Anglesey. Paget had been a distinguished soldier in the Napoleonic Wars. Like his neighbour Hatherton, Paget was not the direct descendant of the name and title he inherited. The direct line of the Paget family came to an end in 1769 with the death of Henry Paget, the first Earl of Uxbridge. Paget's father, Henry Bayley, who inherited the title in 1784 was descended from the Pagets through his mother Caroline who was the first Earl's grand-daughter by his younger brother.⁵⁶ Like Hatherton, Paget, too, was heavily in debt in the 1830s - "Hedonistic extravagance had resulted in one of the largest of

contemporary debts." In 1834 the debt stood at £686,464.0.0.⁵⁷ Unlike Hatherton, Paget inherited a tradition of exploiting the mineral resources of his estates to the full. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Pagets encouraged the development of iron working in the Rising Brook valley which went into decline with the rise of the Black Country iron industry.⁵⁸ During the eighteenth century the profitability of the mining operations in the Old Park at Beaudesert went into decline. Removing the enterprise to the new pit at Brereton Hayes did not halt the decline. The undertaking was a limited success. Between 1815 and 1827 a capital expenditure of £8,427 realised only £5,000 profit from annual sales of 30,000 tons of coal. In 1828 Joseph Palmer took on the lease of the colliery with the undertaking to pay £1,500 a year in royalties on annual sales of 20,000 tons of coal. Palmer, however, seems to have mined the coal badly in his desire to make a quick profit, and after 1831 he never paid above the minimum rent. In 1840 the decision was taken to terminate Palmer's lease now held by his widow since his death in 1836. The Marquis wanted to exploit his mineral resources at Chasewater, but he was unable to do so as long as Mrs. Palmer held the lease of the Hayes Colliery, because one of the clauses of the lease was that the Marquis would not open another pit to compete with the one at the Hayes! The lease was finally surrendered in 1847. In the same year the Marquis tried to lease 400 acres at Chasewater (then known as Norton Pool) for the development of the minerals there but there were no investors willing to take the risk because there were no transport facilities available to ship the coal to the nearby Wyrley and Essington canal (now under the management of The Birmingham Navigation Canal Company). The company had a feeder canal from the pool but was unwilling to accept the cost of adapting it for barge traffic until there were coal producing mines to make the venture profitable.⁵⁹ The development of mining was a hazardous venture and involved a high degree of risk taking in "new

territories or frontier regions" like Cannock Chase. In these circumstances it was more likely for the landowner to provide "the capital and management for the industrial undertakings on their estates... for no one but the royalty owner himself might be willing to hazard his capital in sinking into untried and unproven depths."⁶⁰ The Marquis, therefore, had to undertake the cost of proving the coal himself, which he proceeded to do in July, 1849. Since his estate was entailed, he had to raise the £20,000 capital needed to develop the coal to the south-east of Chasewater from his current income. A second pit was opened between 1851 and 1852. By 1853 the two pits were drawing 1500 tons of coal a week between them but there was a daily working loss instead of the anticipated annual profit of £4,000. The Marquis was in ill health - "a lonely, failing, deaf old man" - and the exploitation of the mineral resources of the estate was turned over to others. In 1853 the Hayes Colliery was leased to the Earl of Shrewsbury, and in 1854 the Hammerwich Colliery was advertised for letting on royalties. The offer was taken up by J.R. McClean and his partner, R.C. Chawner.

4. From marginal to modern industrial region: boom and bust 1854-1879

McClean and Chawmer paid only £16,000 for plant which had cost £46,000 to develop.⁶¹ Yet it was a good time to take on the lease of the colliery because the *Railway Mania* for promoting railway companies and for speculating in railway shares had not yet exhausted itself. Between 1843 and 1848 nearly 3,048 miles of railway lines had been laid which entailed an enormous demand upon the metal and coal industries.⁶² In response to the stimulus of this demand for iron and coal: the Brownhills Colliery Company was begun by William Harrison on a lease from Phineas Hussey of Little Wyrley Hall in 1849, the Old Coppice pit at Cheslyn Hay (as Wyrley Bank was now known) was opened by Edward Sayers on a lease from Lord Hatherton during 1849/50, and during the same period the Old

Hednesford Colliery Company was begun by Francis Piggot on a lease from Lieutenant-Colonel Levett of Burton. During this period Hatherton re-opened his pits at Rumer Hill, and leased the Longhouse Colliery to Mrs. Palmer; and the Conduit Colliery Company began operations to the south-west of Chasewater. The Birmingham Canal Navigation Company fostered this growth of the coalfield by cutting an extension to Churchbridge from Pelsall via Norton Canes in 1856, and by extending Vernon's branch to the outskirts of Cheslyn Hay in 1857.⁶³ The response of the South Staffordshire Railway was to lay down branch lines from Walsall to Cannock, and from Pelsall to Norton, in 1858. The Cannock Chase coalfield, according to A.J. Taylor, stood on the threshold of a new era in which: "a coalfield, characterised by shallow workings, limited local markets, and the activity of small entrepreneurs, gave place to an extended area of deep winnings, supplying an extensive market and dominated by large capitalists and joint-stock companies."⁶⁴ Certainly all the criteria for the transition from a traditional to a modern industrial society were present: enterprising men, banks and other institutions, increase in investment in transport and communication, and the expanded scope of internal and external commerce. The transition, however, was to proceed at a somewhat faster pace than Rostow postulated though it would be characterized by low productivity methods and old social structures.

The development of the coalfield proceeded very rapidly between the years 1849 and 1879 when nineteen new pits were opened throughout the length and breadth of the Chase. The growth of the coalfield between 1849 and 1879 mirrored the general national growth of the coal industry during the same period for the years between 1850 and 1875 were, according to A.J. Taylor, "a period of relative prosperity for the coal industry. These years saw the industry attain its greatest rate of growth and they culminated in the most

spectacular boom it ever experienced."⁶⁵ Between 1845 and 1875 the British coal industry reached its peak of coal production with an annual growth rate of 3.5% compared to 2.1% in the years 1875-1913. This growth rate was not continuous: "The industry tended to move forward in a series of lurches, each short period of advance being followed by one of relative quiescence and consolidation."⁶⁶ Periods of advance were 1854-1856, 1864-1866, and 1871-1873. The Chase was not affected by the first two booms in terms of pits opened, although five new pits were opened between 1860 and 1866 - the Conduit C.C. No.1 pit and the Cannock Chase C.C. No.3 pit in 1860, the Brownhills C.C. Highbridge pit at Pelsall and the Essington Wood Colliery (becoming Holly Bank Colliery in 1895) in 1863, and the Cannock and Rugeley C.C. Cannock Wood pit in 1866. The boom of 1871-1873, when profits of 2/- per ton were made, was due to the sharp expansion in the demand for iron and steel to meet the needs of the Franco-Prussian war, with the concomitant demand for increased supplies of coal. The coal industry was not equipped to meet this demand for coal with the result that pithead prices doubled: "The emergency brought new capital and labour pouring into the industry. Workings earlier abandoned as no longer economic were re-opened and output rose by ten per cent in two years and supply gradually came to terms with demand. By the end of 1873 the general boom had exhausted itself. Output continued to rise but now with falling prices, until in 1875 it reached 133 million tons. At this figure production remained firmly stabilised until 1880 when demand began to move forward."⁶⁷ There are more losers than winners in a boom because many of the collieries projected in the years of high demand do not come into operation by the time the boom is spent, some never reach maturity, others are kept standing for years until they can be operated at a profit, and some are sold at a price well below the cost of their winning to entrepreneurs who are thus able to write off much of the initial capital cost.⁶⁸ This was the experience of

the Cannock Chase coalfield. East Cannock cost £150,000 to open, and sold for £20,000. Leighswood cost £100,000 to open, and sold for £5,000. Fair Oak cost £200,000 to open, and sold for £20,000. Cannock and Huntington cost £150,000, and sold for £20,000. Mid-Cannock cost £100,000 to open, and sold for £20,000.⁶⁹

This kind of experience, however, was not unique to the years following 1873 as we have seen for McClean and Chawner paid the Marquis of Anglesey only £16,000 for a colliery that had cost £46,000 to open. Much of the money to finance the opening of a colliery was provided by joint-stock note issuing banks. The Bank Act of 1826 enabled this kind of bank to be established outside a radius of 65 miles from London. By 1842 there were 112 such banks enabling the public with money to invest to provide the finance needed for entrepreneurs like McClean and Chawner. Joint-stock enterprises tended to be discredited by "the speculative ambitions" of investors who did not pay sufficient attention to the "proven opportunities and needs of the local operator."⁷⁰ It was vitally important to do this in developing the Cannock Chase coalfield for running sand and drainage were the two major problems that had to be overcome as pits were sunk ever deeper. Drainage was a severe problem for the engineer who sank the second pit at Hammerwich. He reported on

February 12, 1852 that: "The engine will commence drawing the water out of the Uxbridge Pit on Saturday, it has been an awfully long job throughout."⁷¹ It was the fate of Jerome Clapp Jerome to invest his money in the Conduit Colliery company without taking these problems into sufficient account. By origin he was from the West Country. When his wife Marguerite inherited a fortune from her father in 1855 he migrated from Appledore in Devon to Walsall where he invested his wife's money in the Birchill's Ironworks, and in the Conduit Colliery Company. The water which proved such a problem at Hammerwich, allied to running sand, drained away the Company's capital. On May 2, 1860 the

Company went into liquidation. James and Charles Holcroft, natives of Bilston, and engineers by profession, took over the Company and fresh sinkings in a new locality brought such good results that in 1866 it was reported that "very rapid strides are now being made in the thin seams over several thousand acres of previously unexplored ground."⁷²

John Robinson McClean was spared such traumas for he had invested in a viable concern. *The Mining Journal* reported in May 1856 that: "Mr. McClean, from his mines in Cannock, produces and conveys by railway at the rate of 2,500 tons weekly more than he did two years since." Since the colliery was producing between 1,500 and 2,000 tons of coal in 1854, this meant a weekly production figure of between 4,000 and 5,000 tons of coal. It was sold on the Birmingham market for 12/1 a ton. This coal "of excellent quality for domestic use" was sent to markets in London, Reading, Oxford, Gloucester, and Shrewsbury. Through the opening up of Pits Numbers 3 and 5 at the bottom end of Biddulph's Pool at Chase Terrace in 1862 the total output of the colliery had risen to 12,000 tons of coal a week by 1865. A report by the British Association in September, 1865 said that: "At this colliery nearly 2,000 men and boys are employed, and the whole arrangements, machinery, etc., are far superior to anything else in South Staffordshire. The Company raised 12,000 tons of coal per week in the winter. Their shafts are all connected by branch lines with the South Staffordshire Railway. There are four independent plants in operation in the Cannock Chase Colliery No.2, 3, 4, and 5."⁷³ The original Hammerwich Pit had closed by this time due to large quantities of the loose Bunter sandstone, which had undone the unfortunate Jerome, entering the workings. To compensate for the loss of this pit the No.6 Pit at Wimblebury was opened in 1866. McClean retired from being the manager and Chief Engineer of the Cannock Chase Colliery Company in 1868 when he

was elected as M.P. for East Staffordshire. He was not a success as an M.P. since he was an ineffectual public speaker.⁷⁴

William Harrison was another adventurous and ambitious entrepreneur. The former farmer turned limestone worker of Aldridge leased the Brownhills Colliery Company from the Hussey family of Little Wyrley Hall in 1849. When he acquired the lease of the Highbridge Pit at Pelsall also from the Husseys in 1863 he was styling himself William Harrison, Esquire and was the resident of Norton Hall.⁷⁵ Harrison had ambitions to be a member of the gentry and he founded the dominant coalowning dynasty of the coalfield. His son, William Beasley, was educated at Harrow where he was a member of the first Harrow cricketing XI to play Marlborough at Lords in 1855. William Beasley was to succeed his father as principal of W.Harrison (Ltd) Brownhills Colliery Company, and as chairman of the Cannock and Rugeley Colliery Company. He also became chairman of the Cannock Chase Coalowners Association, and President of the Mining Association of Great Britain. In 1897 he was appointed the High Sheriff of Staffordshire.⁷⁶ His son, William E. Harrison, was educated at Eton, and Oriel College, Oxford. Like his father, William E. became the chairman of the two collieries associated with the family name, and High Sheriff of Staffordshire. He would also take an active part in local county government being elected a County Councillor in 1913, and an Alderman in 1925.⁷⁷ Both father and son were ardent patriots committed to the defence of the nation. William Beasley was known as *Captain* Harrison because he was one of the founders of the Staffordshire Volunteer Corps, and commanded the Brownhills Company between 1859 and 1879. William E. was known as *Colonel* Harrison for his part in forming a field company of Royal Engineers when the Staffordshire Territorial Force was inaugurated in 1908. William Beasley had a house and estate at Wall, and rode to hounds. William E. had a house and

600 acres at Burton-on-Trent where he specialised in breeding shorthorn British Friesan, and Blue Albion cattle. In the careers of the Harrisons is illustrated Rostow's criterion that the transition from traditional to modern industrial society takes place within the old social structures and values.

Joseph Hawkins was one of the numerous coalmasters who owned small family pits employing small workforces. He was born at Cheslyn Hay in 1812. At the age of 12 years he was working as an engine-winder at one of the pits belonging to the Gilpin family. He showed such unusual aptitude with machinery that he was appointed Chief Engineer of the Churchbridge Works and Colliery while still in his teens. At the age of 20 he was the manager of the Old Coppice Colliery belonging to Edward Sayers who was content to work only the top measures of coal. Hawkins took the opportunity to acquire the colliery, and to work it on more progressive lines, in 1872. He sank a new deep shaft in 1875.⁷⁸ Hawkins was of the same breed of entrepreneurs as William Gilpin. He was content to be a prosperous industrialist and lived in a modest house in the centre of Cheslyn Hay. His children however were more ambitious and hankered after the status of gentry. His youngest son, Thomas Albert, worked down the pit and learning about mining engineering in the practical way his father had done before him since he was 14 years of age. When his father died in 1907, Thomas took over the management of the Old Coppice Pits. He made it his concern to make the colliery profitable, and a source of employment for a great many people in the locality. Where his father had been content to transport his coal by cart and canal boat, Thomas laid down a railway sidings at the colliery and connected them with a branch line to the L.N.W.R. line at Churchbridge. In 1920 he sank another deep shaft to preserve the momentum of the colliery.⁷⁹ In these ways he illustrates Roy Church's claim that enterprise is stimulated by the need to pursue modest profits in a highly competitive

market. His older brother, Henry Hawkins, founded the Longhouse Tileries on the Watling Street at Bridgtown.⁸⁰ Both brothers owned several farms where they bred horses, sheep, and cattle for exhibiting at local and county agricultural shows. Both brothers pursued the aristocratic sport of shooting, and were reputed to be two of the finest shots in the county. Thomas Albert built an imposing house called Glenthorne directly opposite the Methodist chapel in Cheslyn Hay where he was superintendent of the Sunday School for 21 years. In 1920 he left the village to live at Aldridge in an imposing mansion called *Aldridge Court*.. He accepted his civic responsibilities by serving as Parish, Rural, and County councillor as well as sitting on the Board of Guardians, and holding the office of J.P. from 1909 onwards. Here were upwardly mobile entrepreneurs entering influential levels of society where they could encourage and create the frame of mind which accepted industrial growth as necessary and beneficial.

McClean, the Harrisons, and the Hawkins could not have achieved their success without the willingness of the local aristocracy and gentry to lease their lands for the development of mineral mining. The chosen instrument for making land available for exploitation was that of enclosure. Between 1853 and 1864 there were five enclosure awards: 1853, Hammerwich; 1857, Burntwood; 1861, Cannock; 1862, Norton Canes (where Hussey and Hanbury were Lords of the Manor); and 1864, Rugeley. Through these enclosures the Anglesey estate gained by award (4,178) and purchase (1,574) some 5,752 acres.⁸¹ As the fortunes of the entrepreneurs prospered so did that of the Angleseys. Colliery royalties were yielding about £21,800 in 1869, and £32,203 by 1883.⁸² The advantage of the enclosures was that it enabled the Angleseys to consolidate their lands into large holdings which could then be leased out to the colliery companies. In 1869 The West Cannock Colliery Company acquired the lease to mine minerals beneath the area of land

between Shoal Hill, Blackfords, Broadhurst Green, and Pottal Pool - some 2,763 acres. The Cannock Chase Colliery Company leased 2,268 acres, The Cannock and Rugeley Colliery Company 2,650 acres, the Mid-Cannock Colliery Company 970 acres, and The Fair Oaks Colliery Company 5,000 acres.⁸³ The companies benefited because these large areas, as D.G.Brown points out, "allowed nearly all the minerals to be mined without entry fees and ... reduced the number of surface compensation claims and often obviated way leave problems." The local areas also benefited because the enclosure awards required the Angleseys to provide roads, and building plots for small investors, Building Societies, and other industrial concerns such as quarries, brick and tile works.⁸⁴

The enclosures, allied to the formation of the colliery companies, created the basic framework of settlement on the Chase. Coalmining was a labour intensive industry. The population of the Chase parishes grew dramatically. That of Cannock rose by 4,648 between 1851 and 1871; and then by 10,628 in the next ten years!⁸⁵ In 1881 Cannock boasted a Gas Company founded in 1865, a market hall built in 1869, a workhouse built in 1872, and a newspaper established in 1878. The Local Board offices were located in Cannock since the formation of the Board in 1877.⁸⁶ Remote, sparsely populated areas grew from tiny hamlets into sizeable communities. Norton (which included Brownhills) increased from 1,628 in 1861 to 2,776 in 1871. Hednesford in 1834 was "an enclosed hamlet on Cannock Chase" containing a number of scattered houses, 304 inhabitants, and a large lake on the shore of which stood an imposing but deserted lodge built by Edmund Peel of Fazeley. Its main claim to fame lay in the fact that there was "extensive stabling for blood horses of which about 120 are generally trained here in the season."⁸⁷ By 1861 the population was 800, there was a station of the L.N.W.R., and the place was "increasing rapidly. The inhabitants are about to erect a district church, school and parsonage, the

ground having already been presented by the Marquess of Anglesey. Here are extensive collieries occupied by Mr. Francis Piggot."⁸⁸ The parish church was built in 1868 and Hednesford became a civil parish in 1870. In 1871 the population was 2,229, and in 1881 it was 7,549. The majority of the inhabitants were mining families. There were 167 mining families in 1871 and 699 in 1881. In 1871 there were 340 men employed in the coalmining industry, and 1,305 men in 1881.⁸⁹ There was a gas company founded in 1872, and public rooms built in 1876.

Some idea of the experiences of some of those who pioneered the way in the developing settlements can be derived from those of Richard Winfindale. He paid his first visit to Hazel Slade in 1864 when he was 10 years of age. He used to drive a cart from Abbott's Bromley to the Beaudesert Colliery (later to be renamed the Cannock and Rugeley Colliery Company) at Cannock Wood. The coal was hauled up with a gin-ring worked by a horse. Instead of roads there were only rough tracks full of deep ruts. On the way home the cart would sometimes become so wedged in the ruts that the horse could neither move it forwards or backwards. There was often a long wait before someone turned up to help him free the cart. In 1872 he moved to Hazel Slade with his father and brother to work in a brickyard belonging to the Hazel Slade Building Society which was owned by the Colliery Company and designed to encourage the workforce to own their own property. To begin with they lived in an uncompleted house without any windows. The biggest problem was obtaining water since none was laid on. The residents had to obtain it from anywhere they could, and then filter it before drinking it. With the nearest shops being at Hednesford, he often had to walk over rough cart tracks and open common in order to do his shopping. On two or three occasions he lost his way in the fog, and spent the night out sleeping on the common.⁹⁰

In 1851 Brownhills was described as "a scattered village and district... where there are extensive collieries belonging to Wm. Hanbury (the principal local landowner) and Wm. Harrison esqs."⁹¹ In 1892 it was dismissively described as consisting "principally of a main street" but it had its own railway station, gas works, police station, public rooms where petty sessions were held once a month, Local Board, School Board, and Parish church built in 1850.⁹² Burntwood, with a population of 819 in 1851, found that its 18,000 acres in 1863 "were considerably built upon for the accommodation of miners."⁹³ Chasetown was the creation of the Cannock Chase Colliery Company. It originated in the manager's house and four cottages built by the Marquis of Anglesey to house the key workers needed for the maintenance of the Hammerwich pit plant. Six other cottages and an inn were built in what became Queen Street for the engineers and draughtsmen of the colliery.⁹⁴ With the enclosure of the waste at Hammerwich plots of building land were made available for purchase by small investors. The local vicar, George Poole, bought 4 acres and erected a terrace of 21 cottages. Joseph Baker of Bloxwich crammed 26 cottages onto his 2 acres.⁹⁵ Because it was McClean's policy not to build company housing for his workers many of them took the opportunity of mortgages provided by Building Societies to build their own homes. The Mining Journal reported that: "we cannot say much for the taste displayed, so far as the architecture is concerned, as they are uniformly of a square packing-box looking shape, each standing by itself, in most instances, and looking as a thing all direct angles can be imagined to look"⁹⁶

The majority of people on the Chase lived in rows of terraced houses with here and there an entry leading into a courtyard behind where the amenities were to be found. The terraces contained tiny back-to-back houses consisting of one room downstairs and one room upstairs. Communal toilets, wash-houses, and water taps were found in the courtyard

where some miners also kept their pigs. To middle-class observers the mining villages of the Cannock Chase coalfield were ugly, unattractive, ill-built, ill-kept, and depressing sights presenting "nothing to elevate or refine, either in the nature of the industry or in the environments of the people's daily life."⁹⁷ A distinction, however, must be drawn between how the miners saw themselves and how middle-class observers saw them. There is some indication..." Roy Church says, "that the inhabitants of the 'dreary' colliery communities saw their lives in a distinctly different perspective from that of the observers who visited them... mining families placed a high value on physical comfort and modern (mass) tastes; many nineteenth century observers drew a contrast between the churlish external aspect of miners' dwellings, and the physical comforts, expensive trappings, and relative luxury of the interiors."⁹⁸

There is also more to a community than meets the eye. The great majority of the people in the mining villages did lead circumscribed lives within walking distances of the pits where they worked under the haze of smoke that drifted from the great pit stacks. Food was bought at the tiny corner shops, and leisure time was spent in the public house. Days away from home to visit relatives in Shropshire or the Black Country were a rarity and eagerly anticipated. But the countryside was only a few minutes walk away where one could enjoy the invigorating air that swept over the heather, and startle the game birds, rabbits, and hares that sheltered within it. The miner on his way to work could hear the song of the skylark. For children there was the Sunday school treat, and an occasional trip on the canal in a colourfully decorated barge. Men and boys learned to swim in the canals. In the more secluded spots bathing suits were not required, and a run around a field in the sunshine soon dried off the bathers! There was football to be played in the winter, and cricket in the summer. Annual wakes with the attendant boxing booths were looked eagerly

forward to by those local sportsmen eager to gain local fame and some extra cash by performing creditably against the visiting professionals. Gardeners competed just as fiercely for the best prizes at the local flower and vegetable shows. The serious minded could improve themselves through making use of the libraries provided by the local institutes and schools. Music played a great part in the life of the people of the Chase for choirs and musicians abounded.

5. From marginal to modern industrial region: Transition and Turbulence

1880-1893

Although the British coal industry quadrupled its production of coal from 64.5 million tons to 287.5 million tons between 1855 and 1914 the production per man declined between 1873 and 1913 as the cost of raising coal increased with increasing depths of shafts, and the distances to be travelled from the coalface to the bottom of the pit shaft. A third of the coal produced was exported overseas by 1914 making Britain the largest coal exporting nation in the world. This overseas market was prone to sudden fluctuations in demand as economic circumstances changed in relation to world trade. Since the Cannock Chase coalfield produced coal for the domestic market, it was subject to the gradual decline of the home market's demand for coal between 1870 and 1913. The share of the demand for coal for general industrial use fell from 26% to 22.5% of the gross national production of coal.⁹⁹

The development and consolidation of the coalfield between 1880 and 1893 reflected the fluctuating fortunes of the coal industry at the national level. The pace of development and immigration slackened in the 1880s. Two new pits were opened up at Aldridge (Leighswood) in 1889) and at Pelsall (Wood Colliery) in 1891.¹⁰⁰ The population of

Cannock increased by only 3,488; and that of Brownhills by 216.¹⁰¹ It was in the Eighties that collieries that had been opened in the boom years were sold off at prices well below the cost of their initial winning. When the Fair Oak Colliery commenced mining operations in the lower valley of the Rising Brook, near Rugeley in 1872 it was hailed as the "largest and most powerful coal company in the Midland Counties."¹⁰² The two shafts that were sunk cost £200,000 to open. One shaft never reached the predicted coal seams and was abandoned in 1875 at a depth of 975 feet. The other was more successful, and worked until 1884 when it became too unprofitable to work.¹⁰³ At sometime in these proceedings it changed hands for £20,000. Mid-Cannock cost £100,000 to open up but excessive royalties, under capitalisation, and the uneconomic cost of producing the coal led to its liquidation in 1882, and its purchase by the Harrison family for £20,000. The colliery was not re-opened, however, until 1914. The Pelsall Iron Company was established by Richard Fryer between 1826 and 1832. In 1851 it passed into the management of Thomas Davis and Boaz Bloomer. Since Davis came from West Bromwich and Bloomer from Dudley they developed an integrated iron works on the Black Country pattern with coal pits close to the furnace mouths linked together with tramways. Canal and railway provided links with wider sources of raw materials to supplement the local ones. In 1873 when the company went public as The Pelsall Coal and Iron Company, "The plant.... contained two blast furnaces for making pig iron... 40 puddling furnaces, ball furnaces and six rolling mills. Annual production of coal amounted to 100,000 tons of coal and 15,000 tons of pig iron."¹⁰⁴ The writing was on the wall for the local industries in 1881 when the directors of the Company were reported in the Cannock Advertiser to be calling in the remainder of the capital to pay off a temporary loan of £20,000 due to an annual profit of only £4,666. The burden of debt and foreign competition led to the collapse of the company in 1892.

The Cannock and Wimblebury company was launched on May 9, 1881 with a capital of £20,000 "to acquire and work the freehold and copyhold estate" of some 46 acres on the borders of Chadsmoor and Hawk's Green.¹⁰⁵ It was soon in difficulties and when the Cannock Local Board requested the Company to provide the statutory paving, sanitation, and drainage for their property in Wimblebury in 1885, they received the following plaintive letter from E. Benton, the General Manager: "We have carefully observed and considered the instructions of the honorable board with reference to our property in Arthur Street, Wimblebury, and regret their deeming of the work necessary. Had the outlay been demanded at a time when our property was profitable to us, when the water supply was likely to be contaminated with sewerage matter and when the population of the village was thronged, their demands would have been felt less seriously; but coming at a time when our property is a source of constant anxiety to us, when nearly three fourths of our houses are always vacant and when the water supply has been the equal to any of the most thickly populated towns and thus beyond the contamination by sewerage matter, we venture to ask the favour of the consideration of the Board whether.. [in view of the rapid decline of the Wimblebury property].. they will not at least postpone their intentions of taking possession of the roads.." ¹⁰⁶ Baron Hatherton was another who felt the burden of inherited debt after succeeding to his estates in 1881. He was faced with the need to spend £7,879 a year on repaying a mortgage and settlement on the Teddesley estate out of a declining income - farm rents fell by 23% between 1877 and 1895. He led a precarious financial existence. In the late 1880s he was left with just £1,000 to pay his household expenses. A balance of £300 from the rentals of his estate in 1889 led him to exclaim, "Oh! What a dreadful thing it is to inherit a debt!" ¹⁰⁷

Depression was not spread uniformly over the Chase coalfield. In 1883 the annual income of the Marquis of Anglesey was £110,598 of which £91,304 (82.6%) was provided by the Staffordshire portions of his estates.¹⁰⁸ The Brereton Colliery Company seems to have had a continuously profitable life. By the 1830s the annual average profit was over £3,000; and in 1841 it was employing some 227 persons.¹⁰⁹ By the mid-1850s the turnover had risen to £25,500 representing annual profits of £9,000. In 1887 there was a profit of £3,157.0.0. on a capital outlay of £132,089.0.0.¹¹⁰ The Walsall Wood Colliery opened in 1879 brought prosperity to an area once noted for its destitute character. The Walsall Wood Pit was sunk in the area on land leased from the Earl of Bradford in 1879. The area had once been scattered waste inhabited by nailmakers, chainmakers, and miners living in extreme poverty. It was noted for its mud hovels, ragged inhabitants, destitution, and wild ways. The opening of brickyards, reinforced by the sinking of the deep and productive pit led to an increase in the number of inhabitants from 2,077 in 1871 to 4,582 in 1891.¹¹¹

The 1880s were good years for all the collieries situated in the triangle of land between Pelsall, Brownhills, and Aldridge with Stubbes Green as its focal point. The Aldridge Colliery Company had two pits working by 1889, and Edward Barnett was working the Coppy Hall Colliery at Stubbes Green. These pits, as befitted their situation on the banks of the B.C.N.'s Daw End extension, mined both coal and ironstone. Other collieries active in the area were the Fishley Colliery, the Pelsall Colliery, the Pelsall Hall Colliery, and the Hope Colliery. These were joined in 1891 by the Pelsall Wood Colliery.¹¹² In the July of 1887 the Cannock and Rugeley Colliery Company purchased two shafts and 40 acres of freehold land from the Cannock and Wimblebury Colliery Company for £2,500. The downcast shaft at Wimblebury was deepened and enlarged, the underground workings of the colliery linked with the Valley Pit of the Cannock and Rugeley Colliery at Hednesford,

and the Valley Pit shafts used for ventilation, and those of Wimblebury for raising the coal.¹¹³ When the Mid-Cannock Colliery closed down in August 1882 some 270 men were put out of work but by the November of 1882 the Cannock Advertiser was reporting that "The collieries in the district continue to be fully employed, and at some of the principal works men are urgently required to supply orders, but men are not readily to be got."¹¹⁴

The turbulent character of the 1880s is reflected in the public disorder of the times. The decade was introduced with a long, bitter strike in 1879. Nonconformists staged heated protests against having to bear a part of the costs for the Anglican sector of the new public cemetery at Cannock in 1878.¹¹⁵ Respectable citizens came to blows on the bowling green at Cannock in 1881 over the issue as to who actually owned the green - the public or the bowling club members.¹¹⁶ The Salvation Army was hounded by antagonistic mobs in the market place at Cannock in 1883.¹¹⁷ Colliery railway stock was derailed and set on fire at Hednesford during the Great Federation Lockout of 1893.¹¹⁸

6. Conclusion

The period 1776-1893 saw the transition of Cannock Chase from a traditional society of limited agricultural and industrial output, innovation and enterprise to a modern industrial society which never quite got beyond the stage of preparation for industrial take off to the stage of sustained economic growth except for that part of the coalfield in the north around Rugeley and Brereton. The first signs of the impending transition were the miners brought in from the Black Country to develop the pits on Vernon's estate at Essington, and the building of Gilpin's edge tool factory at Wedges Mills in the late 1780s. The coalfield was opened up for further expansion by the cutting of the Wyrley-Essington canal in the early 1790s. The next major impetus for the development of the coalfield was provided by two able and ambitious entrepreneurs on the west of the coalfield around Brownhills -

J.R.McClean and W.Harrison - in the 1850s. The third major impetus was provided by the boom of 1871-1873 created by the Franco-German war. In the wake of the boom population increased rapidly, existing settlements grew rapidly and new ones were formed. None of this would have been possible without the willingness of the local landowners to exploit the industrial resources of their estates, in the first instance to discharge crippling burdens of debt. It was left to the mid-century generation of landowners and upwardly mobile entrepreneurs to provide the political will for seeking economic change as beneficial and worthwhile in its own right.

The industrialization of the Chase provided Methodism with an open, expanding mission field into the first two decades of the twentieth century as new industrial settlements were created around new mining and manufacturing plants. The growth of Methodism also took place in two main stages with a sub-division in the second phase. There was the period of colonization between 1776 and 1879 followed by the period of consolidation from 1880 onwards. Migrant miners brought it originally to Wyrley Bank in the south, and itinerant preachers established it at Cannock Wood in the north at the beginning of the nineteenth century. From 1836 onwards the Primitive Methodists missioned the region from their base in Lichfield as an expanding region in its own right. By 1880 there were enough people and the region was wealthy enough for the local Methodists to have their own independent circuits based within the region. This growth of Methodism supports H.D.Rack's observation that Methodism "benefited greatly from population growth in areas where parochial weaknesses and occupational patterns favoured a relatively plebeian movement which was both well managed and flexible."¹¹⁹ The analysis and account of the growth of Methodism on the Chase is the subject of the next three chapters.

Endnotes

1. R.Church, editor, *The Dynamics of Victorian Business. Problems and Perspectives* (1980), 43
2. W.W.Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth. A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1961), 5
3. *ibid.*, 7
- 4.W.Molyneux, "Cannock Chase and Its Coalmines" in *Railway and Commercial Gazette*, Part I (25/07/1863), 1
- 5.F.W.Hackwood, *Oldbury and Roundabout* (1915), 147
- 6.M.J.Wise, editor, *Birmingham and Its Regional Survey: A Scientific Survey* (1951), 162
7. *ibid.*, 272-273
- 8.quoted in C.J.Gilson, "The Wyrley Essington Canal" (*Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeological Society* reprint 1971), 27
- 9.W. Pitt, *Topographical History of Staffordshire* (1818), 129
- 10.*Colliery Guardian* 31/01/1873
- 11.*Cannock Advertiser* 09/01/1926
- 12.J.S.Roper, *History of Dudley* (nd), 40
- 13.R.Francis, *The Industrial History of Cannock Chase* (nd), 14-17
- 14.R.D.Woodall, *Aldridge, Rushall and Pelsall Yesterdays* (nd), 25
- 15.J.Evans & M.Albutt, *Essington* (1993), 36
16. *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 100
- 17.J.Homeshaw & R.Sambrook, *Great Wyrley 1051-1951* (1951), 30
- 18.R.Plot. *The Natural History of Staffordshire* (1686), 60
- 19.Francis, *Industrial History*, 19
- 20.J.V.Becket, *The Aristocracy in England 1660-1914* (1986), 212 & 216
21. *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 149. Which suggests that Rugeley was competing with Cannock as a fashionable holiday resort. In 1756 Dr.Wilkes had extolled the agreeable situation of Cannock, and its waters which were of "great service to such people as have thin blood and fibres too relaxed." [in Stebbing Shaw, *The Antiquities of Staffordshire*, Volume II (1792), 317]
- 22.A.F.Denholm, "The Impact of the canal System on Three Staffordshire Towns 1760-1850", 60
- 23.R.Woodward, "Coalmining in and around Rugeley" in *Journal of the Staffordshire Institute of Archaeological Studies* No.5, 21
24. *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 149
- 25.Francis, *Industrial History*, 21
- 26.D.G.Brown. "The Economic Development of the Marquess of Anglesey's Estates 1842-1891" (Wolverhampton Poly MA thesis 1985), 33
- 27.W.Molyneux. "Cannock Chase and Its Coalmines" *Railway and Commercial Gazette*, Part III (August 1863), 1
- 28.Molyneux, Part IV, (26/09/1863), 1. Thereby creating problems for C.M.Peel who was unable to ascertain which of the numerous pits at Brereton belonged to the Talbots and which belonged to the Pagets. Paget was unable to obtain wayleave rights for his mines over Talbot's land and had to build a steam powered incline plane in order to raise his coal to Stylecop. From there he constructed a horse-drawn tramway "over Rugeley waste.. and along town center streets to the canal.." [Brown, "...Marquess of Anglesey's Estates..", 34]
- 29.C.Hadfield, *The Canals of The West Midlands* (1985), 97
- 30.F.W.Hackwood, *Staffordshire Customs and Superstitions and Folklore* (1924), 21
- 31.D.Huffer, *The Communications of Wolverhampton* Part 4. "Canals. The Full Development." *The Blackcountryman* Volume 26 No.3 (1993), 57
32. *ibid*, 57. The Worcester and Birmingham Canal was not completed until 1815.
- 33.Gilson, "Wyrley and Essington Canal", 23
34. *ibid*, 25
- 35.Wise, *Birmingham and Its Regional Setting*, 276
36. Rostow, *Stages of Economic Growth*, 7
- 37.Hadfield, *Canals of the West Midlands*, 97
- 38.Thus Cornish miners lived "in cottages either rented or erected by themselves; for as soon as a Miner has saved a little from the profits of his labour, he encloses a small piece of waste land, builds a tenement, plants a pittance of ground for a garden, and becomes the proprietor of the spot on which he dwells." (*Methodist Magazine* 1810, 39) Some of Vernon's miners were Methodists who had migrated from Tipton,

Wednesbury, and Dudley in the 1780s. They were supported in their legal battle by the Methodists at Wyrley Bank.

39.Homeshaw & Sambrook, *Great Wyrley 1051-1951*, 34

40.E.Homeshaw, "William Gilpin of Churchbridge" in *Cannock Advertiser*, December 1952. [Homeshaw based his articles on A.C. Pratt's series of articles in the *Midland Counties Express* entitled "Bits of the Old Black Country: Cutting Roads To Fortune With Edge Tools." This one taken from "Part I. From Dudley Street To London Row" (22/09/1883), 120-121]

41.E.Homeshaw, "Gilpin Moves to His Mill" *Cannock Advertiser*, January, 1953. [Pratt, Cutting Roads To Fortune With Edge Tools. "Part III,- From London Row To Blade's Mill. " (*Midland Counties Express* 06/10/1883), 128-129]

42.P.Sides in an article for the Great Wyrley History Exhibition of 1967 entitled "The Story of William Gilpin", claimed that William Gilpin was a native of Wednesbury who set up in business at Piper's Row in Wolverhampton in 1763. The development of the charcoal burning industry at Bewdley created a demand for axes with which to cut down the timber needed for charcoal burning so Gilpin moved to Wedges Mills where two brothers named Wedge owned a flour mill, married the daughter of one of the brothers, and converted the mill to a blades-mill. Against this version of the Gilpin story can be set the facts that: i. Gilpin died in 1835 aged 71 years which means that he was born in 1764; ii. *The Birmingham Trade Directory* for 1781 names a Thomas Gilpin as landlord of the Red Cow Inn, and Daniel Fieldhouse as an edgetool maker in St.John's Street. iii. Gilpin did marry Fanny Bradney as local traditions about her relations demonstrate.

43.J.Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution. Early industrial capitalism in three English towns* (1974), 11

44.Homeshaw & Sambrook, *Great Wyrley*, 33

45.E.Homeshaw, "Gilpin Moves His Men to Local Iron and Coal." *Cannock Advertiser*, February, 1953. [Pratt, Cutting Roads To Fortune With Edge Tools. " Part IV. From Brade's Mill To Churchbridge (*Midland Counties Express* 11/10/1881), 131-133]

46.Pitt, *Topographical History*, 449

47.F.W.Hackwood, *Chronicles of Cannock Chase* (1912), 84

48.R.W.Sturgess, "Landowners, Mining and Urban Development in Nineteenth-century Staffordshire" in Ward and Wilson, editors, *Land and Industry: The Landed Estate and The Industrial Revolution* (1971),

49.Plot, *Natural History*, 6

50.Pitt, *Topographical History*, 315

51.M.Wright ("Pitman") Hatherton Journal - 3. "Staffordshire Bogs turned into Fertile Land" *Express & Star*

52.Pitt, *Topographical History*, 315

53.Sir.F.Wrottesley, "Mr. Justice Talfour and the Cannock Chase Mining Cause of 1842." *Collections for a History of Staffordshire* (New Series) Volume LXVI (1948), 13-16 & *Victoria County History*, Volume 5, 62

54.Hadfield, *Canals of The West Midlands*, 132-133

55.Sturgess, "Landowners, Mining and urban development.."

56.Hackwood, *Chronicles of Cannock Chase*, 70-72 contains details of Anglesey's career and family history.

57.Brown, "...Marquess of Anglesey's Estates..", 41-42

58.Francis, *Industrial History*, 4-6 contains information about the Paget's involvement in the Rising brook iron industry.

59.Brown, "...Marquess of Anglesey's Estates..", 35-41

60.F.M.L.Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (1963), 172-174

61.Brown, "...Marquess of Anglesey's Estates..", 45-50

62.C.P.Hill, *British Economic and Social History 1700-1975* (1976), 78

63.Hadfield, *Canals of the West Midlands*, 260

64.A.J.Taylor, "The Staffordshire Coal Industry" in *Victoria Country History*, Volume V, 77

65.A.J.Taylor, "The Coal Industry" in Roy Church, editor, *The Dynamics of Victorian Business: Problems and Perspectives to 1875*. (1980), 48

66. *ibid*

67. *ibid*

68. *ibid*

69.Brown, "...Marquess of Anglesey's Estates..", 104

70.Hill, *British Economic and Social History*, 144-145

71.J.R.Francis, *The Cannock Chase Colliery Company Limited* (1980), 12

72.M.Wright ("Pitman"), *The Friendship of Cannock Chase* (1935), 49-52

73. Francis, *Cannock Chase Colliery Company*, 13

74. John Robertson McClean was born at Belfast in 1813. His father was a Merchant Banker in the city. McClean studied at Glasgow University with the intention of becoming a civil engineer. His apprenticeship was served with Messers Walker and Burgess of Westminster where McClean set up in business on his own account in 1844. Pressure of business led him to take on Francis Styleman, a former articled employee of his, as a partner in 1849 which was the year he was made chief engineer of the South Staffordshire Railway serving Dudley, Walsall, and Lichfield. Six months after the completion of the line McClean became the first individual to lease a railway when he bought the lease for 21 years. To begin with it ran at a loss, but when it was taken over by the London North-Western Railway in 1851 it had an average weekly profit of £1,000. McClean formed the South Staffordshire Waterworks Company in 1853 when he saw the possibilities of collecting water from certain springs and pools to the west of Lichfield, and pumping it along mains laid alongside the railway lines to Dudley. Difficulty in raising the capital delayed the start of the scheme until February 1856, and the pumping station was not completed until 1858. McClean as chief engineer elected to take a percentage of all contract work rather than to draw a salary. In 1864 and 1865 he was chosen to be the president of the Institution of Canal Engineers in recognition of the prominent part he played as a member of the international commission called together in 1855 to consider the feasibility of building a ship canal across the Suez isthmus; and as a member of Royal Commissions held to enquire into the Thames Embankment between 1861 and 1863, cattle plague in 1865, and railways in 1865. He was appointed Government Engineer to a number of harbours in the British Isles (like Dover and Plymouth) and the Channel Islands (Alderney) in 1865. Sunstroke whilst on a tour of India enfeebled his health severely - he died on the 13th of July, 1873 at the age of 60 years. The source of information for the life of J.R. McClean is J. Van Leerzem's official *History of the South Staffordshire Waterworks Company* which is in the process of being published.

75. Copy of lease provided by D. Brown of Cannock Public Library

76. *Cannock Advertiser*, March/1912 & G. Rickward and W. Gaskell, *Staffordshire Leaders: Social and Political* (1907), 205

77. Newspaper cuttings in the scrapbook of Sir J. O. Whitehouse by courtesy of his son the late E. R. Whitehouse.

78. *Cannock Advertiser* January/1907

79. *Cannock Advertiser* 11/12/1909 & March/1936

80. *Cannock Advertiser* 15/08/1925 & 22/08/1925

81. Brown, "...Marquess of Anglesey's Estates..", 66

82. The Angleseys also had land in the Isle of Anglesey (9,620 acres), Derby (1,559 acres), and Dorset (1,117 acres). The bulk of their Estate (17,441 acres) was in Staffordshire, and in 1883 provided 82.6% (£91,304) of their total income (£110,598). [Brown, 13]

83. Brown, 36

84. *ibid*, 73

85. R. A. Lewis, *Staffordshire Population Since 166*, Local History Source Book No. G.20 (S.C.C.E.C. 1975), 39

86. Kelly's *Staffordshire Directory for 1880*, 76

87. White's *Staffordshire Directory for 1834*, 487-488

88. Kelly's *Staffordshire Directory 1863*, 452

89. S. Belcher. "The Provision of Miners Housing: The District of Hednesford." (Wolverhampton Polytechnic MA thesis 1987), 158

90. *Cannock Advertiser*, 1938

91. White's *Directory of Staffordshire 1851*, 573

92. A. Williams. *Sketches in and around Lichfield and Rugeley* (1892), 62

93. Kelly's *Directory of Staffordshire 1863*, 436

94. E. O'Donell. *Old Chasetown*, History Source Book L.38 (nd), 58

95. O'Donell, 59

96. Francis, *Cannock Chase Colliery Company*, 58

97. Hackwood, *Chronicles of Cannock Chase*, 133

98. R., Church, *The History of the British Coal Industry, Volume 3, 1830-1913* "Victorian Pre-eminence" (1986), 621-622

99. F. Cruzot. *The Victorian Economy* (1982), 263-271. The effects of this decline upon the Chase coalfield were offset by its growing contribution to coal output of South Staffordshire as the Black Country coalfield went into decline. It was providing more than one third of the total production in 1880, about half in 1898, and some 70% by 1914. [Benson, *British Coalminers*, 20]

100. Gould, *Men of Aldridge*, 119-120^o. Lewis, *Staffordshire Population*, 39

101. Lewis, *Staffordshire Population*, 39
102. *Colliery Guardian* 31/01/1873
103. Brown, "... Marquess of Anglesey's Estates..", 102
104. R.Shill. *The Pelsall Ironworks* (nd), 1-4
105. *Cannock Advertiser* 14/05/1881
106. *Minutes of The Cannock Local Board*, Volume 2, 1882-1885, 164
107. Sturgess, "Landowners, Mining and urban Development.."
108. Brown, "... Marquess of Anglesey's Estates..", 13
109. Francis, *Industrial History*, 23
110. Woodward, "Coalmining in and around Rugeley", 26 & *Victoria County History*, Volume II, 77
111. *Victoria County History*, Volume XVII, 227
112. Gould, *Men of Aldridge*, 119-120 The success of the collieries in the south-east quadrant of the coalfield helped to solve a major problem of the colliery owners,- namely the monopoly of coal freight charges held by the L.N.W.R. Company. P.L.Clark points out that in 1872 the Daw End Branch Canal was the only means of transport for the brick and tile, and small coal works in the south-east part of the coalfield with the result that many of them were situated close to it. With the opening of new collieries, and the rapid expansion of the brick and tile industry, this form of transport became inadequate with the result that in 1879 the Midland Railway opened a branch line from Aldridge to the Walsall Wood colliery, thus creating a precedent for other encroachments upon the territory of the L.N.W.R. In 1882 the Midland Railway extended its Walsall Wood branch line to the Cannock Chase and Wolverhampton Railway at Norton East. This extension captured much of the traffic formerly carried by the L.N.W.R. from the pits of the Cannock Chase, and the Cannock and Rugeley Colliery Companies with the result that the volume of coal carried by the L.N.W.R. from these pits dropped from 350,000 tons in 1882, to 42,000 tons in 1883 [P.L.Clark. "Staffordshire Railways" in *Victoria County History*, Volume II (1967), 322]
113. *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 62
114. *Cannock Advertiser* November/1882
115. *ibid* 06/07/1878
116. *ibid* 13/08/1881
117. *ibid* 07/04/1883
118. 23/09/1893
119. H.D.Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast. John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (1989), 329

Chapter Five

METHODIST COLONIZATION OF THE CHASE: 1776-1836

1. Introduction

The only writer to take a serious interest in the history of Methodism on Cannock Chase was the Express and Star journalist Meshak Wright better known as "Pitman". He was a Wesleyan Methodist local preacher and he is supposed to have written a history of Wesleyan Methodism on the Chase. His son did not know of it and if such a work exists there do not appear to be any extant copies of it. This study has been compiled from a variety of sources containing a variety of biases and prejudices.

The Cannock Advertiser is the prime source of information for Methodism in the Cannock Chase area. The first editor was committed to the values of a traditional deferential society as modified by the democratic spirit of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Civic pride and a healthy self-esteem must give due respect and gratitude to the higher orders of English society in order to maintain the stability of that society.

Local pride, political allegiance, and varying degrees of religious belief colour the individual reports of towns, villages, and hamlets to be found in the Staffordshire County Directories of White and Kelly - as they do of the reporting in the various county newspapers and journals.

Local hearsay can be a source of misinformation. M.W. Greenslade identifies the site of the original Methodist chapel at Cheslyn Hay with "a small brick building in Station Street with an almost illegible inscription above the door."¹ This identification was probably derived from hearsay based on Rev. Josiah Thomas' claim made in 1921 that the first chapel was a thatched building opposite William Gilpin's coalwharf.² Cornelius

Whitehouse, whose father was a trustee of the chapel that replaced the original building in 1817, identifies the building in Station Street as the New British Schoolroom built in 1824 "at what is known as "Wood's Lot", facing towards what is now Station Road, towards which a grant was obtained from the British School Authorities. This was let as a day school to Messers William Pratt and Aaron Buswell, for which 70/- per annum was paid, whilst the trustees reserved the use of the School on Sundays, in order that those Sunday Scholars, who had no means of learning to write, could be taught on the Sabbath.."3

The local histories of Methodism are more concerned with preserving facts than with analyzing their significance; and with giving due credit to prominent local families associated with their churches, than with assessing the significance of their contribution to the life of the church and the local community.

Connexional Magazines are the production of administrations rightly concerned with glossing over internal differences, and with muting controversy, in the interest of preserving the harmony of their connexions.

Information about people's beliefs, attitudes, and actions had to be gleaned from memoirs, obituaries and memorials in the connexional magazines; and from a wide variety of local histories and Methodist biographies and autobiographies. Due allowance had to be made for the fact that they were representative of the kind of people Methodism wanted to produce, and were being used to promote the ideal Methodism wanted its members to emulate. Even the obituaries in the local papers were concerned to present their subjects in the most favourable light.

The historian must beware of treating his sources uncritically and of allowing his own prejudices to so colour his own narrative as to replace one myth with another. Richard Heitzenrater warns about the errors to guard against when studying the traditions of a

living religious movement like Methodism. He warns against being narrow and provincial in outlook, shallow and simplistic in analysis, nostalgic about the romantic achievements and personalities of the past, partisan in the selection of those portions of the past which support one's own opinions and prejudices, and searching for panaceas in the ideas and institutions of the past that would provide solutions for contemporary problems if introduced into the present.⁴

To-day Cannock Chase is a small distinctive region of some 25 square miles of forested upland stretching in a triangle from Milford towards Hednesford, Cannock Wood and Upper Longdon. Originally a huge royal forest that once extended from "the Rivers Penk and Trent in the north, to Wolverhampton, Wednesbury and Walsall in the south. From Tamworth in the east .. as far to the west as Penkridge and Brewood."⁵ it had become in the eighteenth century a featureless waste of gorse and heath some forty square miles in area. Three roads crossed the Chase. The oldest was the former Roman Road known as the Watling Street which ran across the centre of the Chase from roughly west to east. Another ancient highway - the London to Chester road - ran roughly from Aldridge in the south-east to Stafford in the north-west via the coaching station at Hednesford. The third road across the Chase was the Walsall to Stafford road which went through Bloxwich and Cannock. This road was turnpiked as far as the Watling street in 1766 but the rest of the road was still so treacherous that the coach drivers preferred to drive along the Watling Street to the Spread Eagle inn on the Wolverhampton to Stafford road and complete the journey to Stafford via Penkridge.⁶

As a result of his study of the pattern of rural Dissent in the nineteenth century Alan Everett came to the conclusion that both Dissent and Methodism were rural movements which took root and flourished in a wide variety of settlement types which were either of

very early or of very late origin, and characterised by an unusual degree of freedom due to the presence within them of large bodies of independent freeholders, self-employed craftsmen, tradesmen and similar groups of inhabitants. An added advantage was if these settlements were to be found dispersed in large parishes with wooded upland areas. Dispersed settlements made it difficult for the gentry and clergy to exercise proper superintendence over the local people - as did the growth of industry with the consequent development of industrial villages like those at Churchbridge and Wedges Mills.⁷ Cannock Chase certainly provided this helpful environment for the growth of both Dissent and Methodism between 1776 and 1836.

As regards parish size, Cannock was a large parish of some 20,000 acres with wooded upland around Cannock Wood. Cannock Wood, itself, was a boundary settlement on the very edge of the Rugeley parish some four hard up-hill miles from Cannock. Pelsall was part of the equally extensive parish of Wolverhampton from which it was seven miles distant. Walsall Wood was part of the extensive, scattered "Foreign of Walsall" from which it was four miles distant. Although the parish of Rugeley was only 3,000 acres in extent it was strung out between the northern border of the Chase and the valley of the River Trent. Brereton was three miles from Rugeley.

As for patterns of landholding, Cannock was a community of early origin with many independent freeholders: "...a survey of unusual detail made in 1554 shows that most of the land was wholly or partly sublet and that some 64% of the cultivated land was in the hands of subtenants... One third of the landholders were absentees."⁸ Aldridge consisted of only 3,000 acres but it had "many smallholders of land." Rugeley was another community of early origin developing into a typical industrial market town of the period.

Moreover, the area as a whole had a reputation for lawlessness and independence. In 1753 the great-grandfather of Elizabeth Birch was one of the ringleaders who raised a strong force of men some three hundred strong to resist the Earl of Uxbridge's plans to turn the Chase into a rabbit warren. Two hundred of the men had the audacity to march to Beaudesert Hall: "At the gates to the house they halted and gave three cheers, shaking their hats in the air. The trumpeter blew his horn, a hat was hoisted on a stick for colours, and they set off for the warrens."⁹ There is a glimpse of the independence of the people at Cannock Wood in the story of the Marquis of Anglesey confronting Bonehill, the keeper of the Windmill Tavern, and asking him if there was any truth in the charge that he refused to acknowledge the Marquis to which Bonehill replied, "Well, they speak the truth, my Lord; good morning."¹⁰

The figure identified with the growth of Methodism in such regions is the itinerant Methodist Preacher who "has long been lionized" says R.H.Martin, "as the hero of the Evangelical Revival. He is usually portrayed as an impassioned and aggressive evangelist who saw the world as his parish and travelled thousands of miles on horseback to harvest a record crop of converts."¹¹ The real hero of Methodist growth on the Chase between 1776 and 1836 is not the professional preacher on the open heath but the local preacher at the open hearth. As Wesleyan Methodism became a national movement based in urban centres with a multiplicity of circuits so the Preachers began to concentrate their efforts on maintaining the strong urban congregations at the cost of the rural fringes. According to John Vickers this process of urban semi-mobility had begun by at least the mid-eighties. The diary of George Story together with a surviving plan from the Salisbury Circuit for 1784-1785 show how "with rare exceptions the three itinerants seem to have confined their attention on Sunday to the three societies at Salisbury, Portsmouth and Newport."¹² A

gifted preacher could exercise such a ministry effectively. Adam Clarke wrote to Wesley from Plymouth on January 30, 1786: "When I was admitted at Conference, I promised, before God and my brethren, to observe the Rules laid down in the Larger Minutes, and to keep them for conscience sake; one of which was, 'To recommend *fasting*, both by precept and example. To the latter, through the grace of God, I have constantly adverted ever since; but to former, viz., recommending it by precept, I must confess, though I have not wholly neglected it, yet I have been too remiss... I know it rejoices your soul to hear of the prosperity of the work of God.. I have some intelligence of this kind to impart. We have and do see glorious days in Dock... The congregations have been wonderfully enlarged... multitudes have been convinced, several converted, and though I do not yet know any who have attained, yet there are several who are panting after *perfect love*.... At Plymouth our congregations were distressingly small for some time. *I went out to the Parade*, and had more hundreds to hear there than I had dozens in the room; and though I have preached *out* in the cold weather at the expense of my hearing and voice, yet have I been amply compensated for both, in seeing an increased congregation in the room, and several of these have been awakened and joined to the Society.... There is one thing that conduces much to the prosperity of the work at Plymouth and Dock, viz., the constant *morning prayer-meetings*, together with several evening ones, which are all productive of good, and are well attended..."¹³ Here was a ministry according to Wesley's concept of an evangelistical pastor but it was being carried on within established societies. Further research by John Vickers into the 'Marriot' collection of Wesleyan circuit plans dating from 1825 and covering virtually the whole of the British connexion led him to the conclusion that by 1825 "the initiative for pioneering new places and establishing new societies had largely passed, whether by deliberate policy or by default, to the local laity,

while the circuit ministers gave themselves to the task of consolidating existing causes."¹⁴

At the grassroots level it was basic cottage based, lay inspired, praying revivalism that was to promote the Methodist colonization of the Chase.

2. Mobile Preachers and Migrant Population 1776-1803

The traditions about the origins of Methodism on Cannock Chase are unanimous that it was Methodist miners from the Black Country towns of Tipton Green, Wednesbury, and Dudley who had moved to Wyrley Bank in order to work Henry Vernon's pits at Essington Wood more profitably for him who brought their Methodism with them to the village.¹⁵ The traditions about the date of their arrival from the Black Country vary. The Rev. Josiah Thomas, a native of the village, recalled in 1921 that they arrived in the 1760s or the 1770s.¹⁶ Cornelius Whitehouse, writing in 1856 and drawing on the memories of his father and older surviving members of the original society, reckoned they arrived in the 1780s. The later date is to be preferred if only on the grounds that the Rev. Henry Sanders, writing in 1794, attributed the decline in the use of peat as a fuel at Shenstone to the fact that good cheap coal could be bought, from among other places, at "the works of.. Vernon, of Hilton Esq., Essington Wood..¹⁷

Wyrley Bank stood on Cheslyn Common at the head of the small, shallow amphitheatre fashioned by the Wyrley Brook out of the borders of the plateau over which the Chase extended in this south-west corner of the region. Coal had been mined on the common for centuries. In some places it lay just a few feet beneath the surface and could be raised by hand quite easily. Since the people who mined the coal supplemented their income by making brooms, and weaving baskets from the ling which grew on the common, it is not surprising that the sides of the shallow coalpits were lined with thin branches of green wood cunningly and strongly plaited together. Cheslyn Common as an "extra

parochial" settlement was outside the bounds of parish law. The people who lived there were "squatters" with precarious claim to the meagre plots of land on which they erected their mud and turf hovels. Being outside the bounds of parish law they tended to be rough, unkempt people with crude, vulgar ways. In the winter months travelling tinkers would pitch their wagons on the common. Some of them took to fencing off the piece of land on which they camped as an insurance against someone else taking it over while they were away in the summer months on their travels. This straggling, irregular collection of hovels and wagons became known as Wyrley Bank. There was considerable ill-feeling between the crude, lawless inhabitants of Wyrley Bank and their respectable neighbours in the ancient village of Great Wyrley. The annual "beating of the parish bounds" was sometimes accompanied by ferocious fisticuffs if some of the inhabitants of Wyrley Bank felt that their miserable holdings were going to be drawn within the reach of the parish priest's authority.¹⁸ On Midsummer Eve a barbaric ceremony was held on the common. Bonfires were built, and hoops covered with blazing twigs were rolled down the slopes of Wyrley Bank. The more foolhardy would remove a cartwheel and roll that down the bank competing with each other in jumping in and out of its bounding, erratic course down the side of the bank. The spectators accompanied this frenzied activity by chanting this incomprehensible jingle:

"As ah wor agoo in up Werley Bonk,

Up Werley Bonk, up Werley Bonk.

Coomin down:

The cart stood still, and the wheel went round.

Coomin down

Agoo in up Werley Bonk. "¹⁹

Just below the crest of Wyrley Bank stood a low bluff of land looking out over the shallow valley where the Washbrook joined the Wyrley brook. On this bluff stood a barn with a thatched roof belonging to a man named Gasser. This was the building chosen by the Methodist miners to be their place of worship. A pulpit, with oblong windows set into the wall on either side of it, was set at one end of the barn; and a gallery, two or three feet deep, was erected at the opposite end.²⁰ The date was about 1789, for the first Baptismal Register contains entries dating from that year. Many of the baptisms in that first year were conducted by a local preacher from Walsall by the name of William Smith. He was credited by the Cheslyn Hay Methodists with having formed the migrant miners from the Black Country at Wyrley Bank into a class, and for being the founder of the first chapel. One of the men who worshipped in this primitive chapel was an edgetool worker by the name of William Morgan. When a boy he had been a witness of the kind of violent mob behaviour faced by Methodist preachers in Wolverhampton which had led John Wesley to compare preaching in the town to like being in a den of lions. He was also present in Wolverhampton on March 28, 1787 when the Noah's Ark chapel was opened by John Wesley whom he described with concise accuracy as " a sharp-looking little gentleman."²¹

William Smith,²² of whose work in the villages around Walsall we know so little, must share the credit for introducing to the Chase the century of phenomenal religious growth between 1736 and 1836 (known as the Evangelical Revival) with the Independent (Congregational) preacher, George Burder. In 1776 Burder preached his first sermon in the kitchen of a farmhouse belonging to his father at Bromstead Heath in the parish of Gnosall. Burder was not a native of Staffordshire. He was born in London in 1752. By profession he was an engraver - having been trained under Isaac Taylor and at the Royal Academy before setting up in business on his own in 1773. He came from a Dissenting family for his father

was a deacon at the Congregational church in Fetter Lane. Burder moved in august evangelical circles. It was the preaching of George Whitefield and William Romaine which first inspired him to preach, and it was Fletcher of Madeley who encouraged him to preach despite his being a layman, and despite his lack of a theological education. The kitchen became too small to hold all the people who wanted to hear him preach so he began to hold his meetings out-of-doors. Crowds of over 500 people so convinced him that "a greater part of Staffordshire was in total darkness" that he began to itinerate around that area of central Staffordshire on the extreme western borders of the Chase. Like many other field preachers who dared to preach in a parish without a license from the Bishop for permission to do so, he met with hostile opposition from the local priest and those of his people who resented the intrusion of a stranger into their territory. At Brewood in 1777 he faced a missile throwing mob. The following year he was at the centre of a "formidable riot" at Gnosall. In 1777 he was ordained to a pastorate in Lancaster but this did not prevent him from continuing his itinerant field preaching in the central parts of Staffordshire. In 1781 he preached at Burslem, Hanley, and Newcastle. In 1783 Burder removed to the West Orchard chapel in Coventry from where he continued to itinerate in Staffordshire. In 1790 he opened a preaching house in Lichfield for Independents, and in 1795 a similar house at Bromstead was registered in his name.²³

Burder faced the riot at Gnosall in the company of Jonathan Scott. He was born at Shrewsbury in 1735. His father was captain Richard Scott of Scott's Hall in Kent. His mother was the wealthy heiress of Belton Grange, Shrewsbury. Scott served as cornet, and then as a captain-lieutenant, in the 7th Dragoons between 1752 and 1769. He saw active service on the Continent during the Seven Years War in 1759. He was always religiously inclined but experienced an evangelical conversion under the preaching of William

Romaine. His habit of preaching wherever his military service took him so offended his superiors that he sold his commission in 1769. He continued to be known as "Captain Scott", and often appeared in the pulpit in uniform. The year prior to his leaving the Army he married Elizabeth Clay of Shropshire, "a lady of both piety and wealth." Despite being pressed to do so Scott never accepted a settled pastorate but chose, instead, to be ordained in 1776 as "a presbyter at large". In the year of his ordination he began itinerant field preaching at Newcastle-under-Lyme where a congregation was formed in 1777. A chapel was built in 1784 on some waste ground he had purchased. Scott was also active in Stoke and Hanley where a chapel was built in 1784. The first minister of the Hanley Tabernacle was James Bodin. In 1786 Bodin "started to preach in the streets of Stafford, despite the hostility of the crowd. An exciseman then opened his house in Martin Street for meetings. The congregation later moved to a house in North Walls behind the Vine Inn, and in 1788 a converted building in Salter Street opposite the Vine was registered for worship. Jonathan Scott sent John Wilson as the first resident minister."²⁴ Someone who had been converted under Scott's preaching in a timber yard in Manchester arrived in Stone and started a cottage meeting with Scott's support. In 1786 a chapel and manse were built with financial assistance from Scott.²⁵

George Burder and Jonathan Scott, together with another preacher called Joseph Cockin, are significant national figures in the history of Dissent because "little genuine evangelism or expansion took place" within eighteenth century Dissent until their pioneering efforts in Staffordshire and Yorkshire in the late 1770s and the middle 1790s.²⁶ Dissent did have a tradition of itinerant field preaching going back to the seventeenth century. The two Baptist movements which arose in England from 1616 onwards used "lay preachers of mean origin... and had their itinerating 'messengers of the churches'."²⁷

Presbyterians were active in and around Stafford from 1648 onwards when houses were licensed for worship at Stafford and Cannock in that year. In 1669 houses were registered at Blymhill and at Gnosall. More registrations took place at Stafford and at Cannock in 1672, and at Gnosall and at Castle Church in 1676. A Presbyterian meeting-house was finally opened at Stafford in 1689, but the registration of houses at Baswich in 1691, and at Cannock in 1700 suggests that itinerant preaching continued.²⁸ There was persistent Independent itinerant preaching in the locality of Saredon and Shareshill at the beginning of the eighteenth century. A group met consistently in the house of a Mr. Swan (or Swain) at Shareshill between 1717 and 1738. In 1717 this group was visited by the Rev. Paul Russell who also preached once a fortnight at Coseley where he had succeeded the previous minister in the capacity of "an itinerant minister."²⁹ George Burder, therefore, was not doing something totally novel in the history of Dissent when he began to preach in and around the neighbourhood of Bromstead in 1776. Since Bromstead is mid-way between Gnosall and Blymhill where the Presbyterians had been active in 1669 and 1676, Burder was drawing on an existing sympathy for Dissent which, coupled with the novelty of field preaching, would account for the large crowds he attracted in such a sparsely populated area. George Burder, did however, help to recall Dissent to its task of evangelism. He took a leading part in the formation of The Warwickshire Association which was designed to assist itinerant preaching in the villages of Warwickshire. He helped to found the London Missionary Society in 1795, eventually becoming its secretary. He also became the second editor of the very influential *Evangelical Magazine*.

The first viable Independent congregation to be established within the bounds of the Chase in the eighteenth century was, ironically, not the result of itinerant village preaching but, like the origins of Methodism at Wyrley Bank, the accidental result of personal

circumstances! At the beginning of the 1790s the newly married Samuel Sleigh, a native of London, moved to Rugeley with his wife to set up in business as a manufacturer of fur hats. Samuel Sleigh bought some waste land on the Brereton Road, built himself a house and business premises, and, in 1794, invited an itinerant preacher from Birmingham named Morgan (who was paid a salary of 21/- a week by a Mr. Wilton, a potter at Hanley) to come and hold services in his kitchen. Pastors from Stone, Uttoxeter, Tutbury, and Newcastle also came to Rugeley to conduct services for the fledgling congregation.³¹

It has been pointed out that capitalist societies based on a free market economy require a highly mobile population.³¹ Such a highly mobile population existed in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain. One of the great achievements of Methodism under Whitefield and Wesley was to create a more flexible concept of Christian ministry open to ordained and lay preachers alike which could itinerate freely among the mobile society that was being created by the industrial revolution, a concept that was taken over into Dissent by men like George Burder and Jonathan Scott. Burder, however, as a settled pastor undertaking preaching tours, was more like evangelical clergymen such as Henry Venn, John Berridge and Charles Simeon who "occasionally left their parishes on extended 'Gospel rambles.'"³² Scott with his ample private income which enabled him to finance the churches he planted was more like the Wesleyan gentleman itinerant Richard Brackenbury. No matter what their status or the nature of their itinerancy Burder and Scott had the same ripple effect with their preaching that Whitefield and Wesley had. Whitefield inspired Burder, Scott inspired James Bodin who began to itinerate. Wesley inspired the miners who migrated to Wyrley Bank. Scott inspired the man who moved to Stone from Manchester to start a cottage meeting as Samuel Sleigh was to do at Rugeley on his arrival from London. The initial growth of Methodism on the Chase illustrates J.S. Simon's observation that, "It

is impossible to understand the swift extension of Methodism if we lose sight of the influence of 'the dispersion.' We must not forget the men and women who, in the little towns and villages, bore their witness to the truth of the doctrines that had led them out of darkness into light."³³ The growth of Methodism and Dissent further illustrate John Vickers' conclusion that it was "not a matter of deliberate strategy, but rather an accidental result of personal circumstances."³⁴

3. Cottage Prayer-Meeting Ministries 1803-1820

Four miles to the south-east of Rugeley lay the ancient hamlet of Cannock Wood situated at the entrance to the Marquis of Anglesey's estate at Beaudesert. The locality was a sparsely populated area of open heath with the occasional relic of the vast forest that once gave the Chase its name. There were a few good farms, and a number of cottages and hovels with enclosed plots of land attached to them. The total area of land enclosed in them in this way was 91 acres. Thomas Rochelle, John Clewly, Thomas Neville, and Joshua Neville held four acres each. Smaller plots of land ranging from one and a half to two and a half acres were held by a whole host of Craddocks.³⁵ One of these Craddocks, Samuel by name, was a carpenter on the Marquis of Anglesey's estate and the steward of the Club Room in the Park Gate Inn at Cannock Wood. At sometime between 1803 and 1805 a Methodist Preacher - probably preceded by William Clowes since he claimed the credit for founding the society³⁶ - found his way to Cannock Wood. Samuel Craddock "welcomed the Methodist Preachers to his house ... The Gospel preached by them proved to be the power of God unto salvation, and to the salvation of several of his neighbours in that wide wilderness. A class was soon formed of the new converts, and he was appointed to the office of leader."³⁷ Craddock used the Club Room for holding Methodist services and meetings.

One of the people who attended the meetings was Elizabeth Gething. She was the daughter of Thomas Gething. At the time Gething and three fellow Salopians were mining coal on land leased from the Earl of Shrewsbury. Although Gething was a staunch member of the Church of England, the long and arduous tramp to the parish church may have contributed to his decision to join his daughter by throwing in his lot with the Methodists. In 1806 the Earl took over the mining of his own coal, formed the Brereton Colliery Company, and made Thomas Gething the manager. On removing to Brereton, Gething opened his house for Methodist meetings and became a zealous worker for the Methodist cause. Two classes were formed out of the people who attended his house. Gething, himself, embarked on his own round of village evangelism, visiting neighbouring villages and hamlets to hold prayer meetings.³⁸ As a result of his endeavours a class meeting was begun in a house at Rugeley near the marl pit in 1806; and houses were registered for worship at Gnosall and at Penkridge in 1809.³⁹ In the same year a site for a Methodist chapel at Brereton was provided by Thomas Birch of Armitage Lodge for the nominal sum of five shillings. His sister Elizabeth loaned the Society meeting in Gething's house the £474 they needed to build the chapel - which was erected in 1810.⁴⁰

1810 was the year when the influence of George Burder and Jonathan Scott in encouraging their Dissenting colleagues to adopt a more flexible approach to their ministries by undertaking village preaching excursions began to make its influence felt upon Cannock Chase. From 1810 onwards the Independent minister at Brewood, John Fernie, began to hold meetings in a cottage opposite Girton Road in Cannock as part of a regular programme of village preaching carried out with the assistance of students from Hackney College.⁴¹ In the August of 1814 a barn - between what are now the Old Penkridge and the New Penkridge roads - belonging to a farmer Goodman was converted

into a chapel. Henry Birch, the occupier of the fine Georgian mansion facing the bowling green, seems to have been the moving spirit behind the enterprise. Thomas Butteaux, the minister, embarked on a round of village preaching. Houses for preaching services were registered at Saredon and Littleworth in 1817, and at Norton in 1820.⁴² Plans to build the New Penkridge Road through farmer Goodman's farmyard may have been responsible for the decision to build the present chapel in 1824, which, according to Cornelius Whitehouse, became "very prosperous and attended by many of the respectable people of Cannock and the villages around."⁴³

In 1810 Andrew Shawyer was appointed by the newly formed Staffordshire Association of Independent Ministers to be the regular pastor of the small congregation that had been assembled by Samuel Sleight at Rugeley with the responsibility for itinerant preaching among the villages in that part of the County.⁴⁴ The meetings were moved from Sleight's house to a disused cottage in Bow Street. There were thirteen members of whom nine were women.⁴⁵ A first attempt to build a meeting-house was frustrated by the opposition of the local people with the loss of £50 to Shawyer. Another site was secured in Elmore Lane at the excessive price of 10/- a square yard. Shawyer raised the £1,000 needed to meet the cost of erecting the building through soliciting subscriptions. As the result of his labours the new chapel was built in 1813. In the meantime Shawyer had been just as active in establishing a round of village preaching in the settlements to the north of the River Trent. Houses were registered for worship at Great Haywood in 1810, Armitage in 1811, Handsacre and Hixon in 1814, Weston-on-Trent in 1817, and as far away as Knightley, near Stafford, in 1818.⁴⁶ This round involved him in travelling over sixty miles on foot every week. In 1819 the extended Staffordshire Association of Independent Ministers who had the responsibility of paying Shawyer's stipend at Rugeley transferred Shawyer to a

pastorate at Bilston. Thomas Butteaux helped to look after the congregation at Rugeley until another pastor was appointed in 1823.⁴⁷

1810 was the year which also saw renewed Methodist missioning in the mining areas around Wyrley Bank and Cannock Wood instigated by David Buxton, a native of Stanton, near Ramsor who was converted at the first camp meeting held at Mow Cop on May 31, 1807. Shortly after his conversion he removed from Stanton to Wyrley Bank to set up in business as a shopkeeper.⁴⁸ He was involved in an abortive attempt to establish a Methodist base in Cannock in 1808 for he was one of the witnesses to the certificate registering the house of Geoffrey Townsend for public worship on June 10, 1808.⁴⁹ The fact that the initiative came from such a disreputable place as Wyrley Bank may have antagonised the respectable inhabitants of Cannock against the venture. At the beginning of the century a party of field preachers known locally as "The Ranters" based themselves at Wyrley Bank. They were probably nothing to do with the sect dating from the days of The Commonwealth but more likely they were what D.H.Whiteley scathingly described as "hedge-preachers; a worthless gang of brawling mendicants... their business, like all rogues and mountebanks of the performing kind, was to make a livelihood by an easy way so they swarmed to religious fairs, etc. Their lives, manners and activities were all alike objectionable.." They peddled what Whiteley described as "a cheap half digested spiritualism... a vague pantheism, which blurred the distinction between good and evil, and which landed them in a moral (or immoral) topsy-turvey."⁵⁰ In 1810 the group paid Cannock a visit in the days when a certain Captain Carey, who lived in the fine Georgian house at the head of the bowling green, was the High Sheriff of Staffordshire. Cornelius Whitehouse tells us that: "they visited the town for several weeks, holding religious

services in the market place, which so annoyed the High Sheriff that he ordered his men to turn his bull against them, which drove them to Wyrley Bank."⁵¹

The failure of the venture at Cannock may have prompted David Buxton's invitation to Hugh Bourne in the July of 1810 to come and mission the Cannock area. Bourne responded to the invitation on Friday July 27. After a long walk of thirty-four miles through pouring rain for the greater part of the day he arrived at Buxton's house at 5 o'clock in the evening. Some sympathisers arrived later to make arrangements for Bourne to preach the following Saturday night and three times on the Sunday. On the Monday John Benton turned up to introduce himself to Bourne before whisking him off to visit the converts he had made and formed into classes in the Essington Wood and Wyrley Bank area. They visited the home of a Mrs. Bagnall in Wyrley Bank whose daughter was the victim of an unrelieved conviction of sin. Despite talking deeply to her Bourne could not bring her peace of mind. On the Tuesday the two men went to Essington Wood where Bourne preached at the class-meeting and saw six people "set at liberty" from their conviction of sin and damnation. Wednesday was spent in yet another fruitless conversation with Mrs Bagnall's daughter. On the Thursday Sarah Shorter and her husband found liberating faith - but not Miss Bagnall. She told Bourne that "all the preachers had talked with her, and it was of no use. I said, 'They have never travailed in birth for you.' I then told her of the sorrow, and that we must both be saved, or it would kill one of us." Both, however, lived to tell the tale but Bourne, on this occasion, had to admit defeat.⁵² He had more success in Cannock on a second visit to the area in 1811 for on November 10 he registered the house of Abraham Forster at Mill Green for worship. John Benton was one of the witnesses to the petition for the license to worship.⁵³

William Clowes also paid a visit to the Chase at about the same time as Hugh Bourne. Clowes arrival at Cannock Wood coincided with a crisis in the affairs of the local Methodists. The crisis appears to have been linked to the changing personal fortunes of Samuel Craddock for he was discharged by the agent of the Marquis of Anglesey in 1810 after more than forty years of service because "conscientiously believing it would be wrong to use the Club room for dancing and amusement which would the next day be used for divine worship, he refused after one annual club dinner to accede to the agents's request that it might be cleared for entertainment purposes."⁵⁴ Since Craddock licensed his own home for services on January 6, 1810,⁵⁵ it is possible that it was a New Year's Eve celebration that led to his dismissal early in 1810. Clowes seems to have arrived at the time of Craddock's removal to Brereton where he seems to have set up in business as a carpenter sometime between June and August 1811. "The work did not progress rapidly," according to Clowes, "but still good was done -souls were saved. In the family of Mr.Turner, God manifested His power by converting the father and the mother, two sisters, and one son; this son is Samson Turner, one of our travelling preachers. The old man was at first very much prejudiced against methodists, professing to be a churchman; but in a conversation with him his prejudice gave way, and he gave his heart to the Lord, and his house became a home for the ministers of God while pursuing their great work."⁵⁶ It is possible that Turner worked in the kitchen at Beaudesert Hall, and that he lived in an old thatched cottage which stood at the foot of Castle Ring near to a famous landmark called the Rawnpike oak. Services were held in the cottage to the accompaniment of dumplings wobbling and spluttering in a capacious pot boiling away in the ancient, wide, open hearth with the chimney gaping to the sky above, and Turner's aged parents seated on the hobs to either side of the hearth.⁵⁷ It was the house of John Linney, however, which was registered

for public worship on November 1, 1811.⁵⁸ Clowes also spent some time missioning Penkridge and Great Wyrley: "I visited from house to house, to invite the people to hear the terms of reconciliation, but I did not see much fruit. I generally had to sleep at nights at public-houses, and often was exposed to filthy and disgusting annoyances... At Worley bank, we were kindly received by Mr.D.Buxton, in our missionary labours, and witnessed partial success."⁵⁹

Clowes and Bourne, therefore, were both active on the Chase at more or less the same time in 1811. The result of their labours was seen when the names of Cannock and Cannock Wood appeared on the plan for March 1812 - which was the first printed plan to bear the name of the Primitive Methodists.⁶⁰ A memorable camp meeting was held at Cannock Wood on July 18, 1813 to consummate the work done on the Chase in the preceding five years. The services began at 8 o'clock in the morning. William Clowes, Hugh Bourne, and a host of lesser lights were present. At night William Clowes preached in John Linney's house and "had an uncommon time."⁶¹

The consolidation of the societies at Cannock and Cannock Wood sparked off a wave of missionary activity in the scattered hamlets and villages on the eastern half of the Chase in which Sampson Turner - destined to be elected president of the Primitive Methodist conference on two occasions - played a prominent part. Sampson Turner was one of a team of local preachers who missioned Brownhills, Pelsall, and Walsall Wood between 1812 and 1818. These were mining areas like Cannock Wood and Wyrley Bank where the seams of coal outcropped close enough to the surface to be mined in shallow pits. The situation was volatile and the result of the work could be ephemeral. Unlearned, superstitious labouring people, who felt that the religious life of their local parish churches was not for the likes of them, reacted with great initial enthusiasm to the novelty of their own kind in seeking them

out to make religion lively and relevant to their own needs. They tended to lose interest just as quickly once the novelty had worn off. Conversions tended to take place within family groups, and the informal cottage meetings which were used to nourish the spiritual lives of the new converts would cease to meet if the family concerned was split by quarrels within its ranks. The Minutes and Roll Book of the Darlaston P.M. Circuit for 1827 show that four out of nine members at Cannock Wood were Craddocks; six out of the eleven members at Walsall Wood were Rowes, and five out of eighteen members at Brownhills were Grouthayes. There were cottage meetings at Cannock Wood, Cannock Lane [between Littleworth and Cannock Wood?], Essington Wood, and Walsall Wood in 1819; but only the society at Cannock Wood was still in existence in 1827.⁶² There was "serious dissension among the Primitive Methodists at Cannock Wood in 1813."⁶³ Joseph Richards was the keeper of the Park Gate Inn at Cannock Wood. He was "noted for his plain speech and his talent for maintaining the balance between the Bible and beer. When a preacher went on too long with his discourse Joseph had no hesitation in walking out... and going off to open the Park Gate for customers."⁶⁴ One result of the serious dissension at Cannock Wood could have been that Joseph Richards transferred his loyalty to the Wesleyans, for a certain Joseph Richards of Hednesford registered a house for worship at Cannock Wood on May 11, 1815; and a barn for worship at Great Wyrley on August 12, 1816.⁶⁵

The opportunity to carry out this mission work had been won for Turner and his associates by the obstinacy of John Benton. At the fifth camp-meeting held at Ramsor on May 26, 1811 Benton received, as he put it, "such a baptism of the Holy Spirit as I never experienced before; and I felt from this day it was my duty to be given up to the work of the ministry."⁶⁶ The work of the ministry, as Benton saw it, was to be a pioneer missionary opening up areas for others to consolidate and to develop. Benton, therefore, did not take

kindly to the proposal of an influential faction led by James Steele at the first Quarterly Meeting of the newly formed Tunstall Circuit in June 1811 to call a halt to all pioneer missionary work in order to consolidate the ground already won. John Benton refused to be shackled by what came to be known as "The Tunstall Non-Mission Law." He returned the circuit plan he was sent, then proceeded to mission the East Staffordshire border to such good effect that he formed a new branch circuit which he handed over to Hugh Bourne to consolidate within the Tunstall circuit. At the December quarterly-meeting he again refused to be bound by the non-missionary law and "gave notice that it was his duty to get souls converted and [that] he would not be tied any longer."⁶⁷ He went off to mission the growing industrial town of Belper in Derbyshire. Sarah Kirkland, the first Primitive Methodist female itinerant, whose salary was paid by Hugh Bourne,⁶⁸ missioned Derby itself in 1815 so successfully that in 1816 it became the head of the second circuit to be formed in Primitive Methodism.⁶⁹ It was from the Derby circuit that Primitive Methodist missionaries went out to establish the movement in Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, and Lincolnshire. It was due to John Benton, Sarah Kirkland and other like-minded preachers that Primitive Methodism "was able to exploit opportunities for growth that would make it by mid-century the largest non-Wesleyan body in English Methodism."⁷⁰

In 1820 the Darlaston Primitive Methodist Circuit was formed. This was the direct result of the missionary work of Sampson Turner and his colleagues for one of their converts at Walsall Wood was William Carter, a Wesleyan from Darlaston. He invited some of the preachers present at the cottage meeting at which he was converted to come over and mission Darlaston. They did so with such outstanding success that in March 1820 Darlaston became the head of a circuit that embraced the whole of the South Staffordshire coalfield. By this time Sampson Turner had become a Primitive Methodist

minister. He preached his last sermon as a local preacher at Essington Wood on July 25, 1818 "This day " he noted proudly in his journal, "J. Benton heard me for the first time. He lost his speech some time before and has never been able to preach since."⁷¹ Benton lost his speech at a camp-meeting held at Round Hill, near Leicester in 1818. He ruined his larynx calming down a crowd thrown into a panic by an unruly horse. For a time he was dangerously ill. He did recover his health but he never preached again.⁷² He returned home to the Chase for a while before finally settling down to the life of a farmer at his wife's home in Leicestershire. He died on February 5, 1856.⁷³

The various Dissenting, Wesleyan, and Primitive Methodist itinerant ministries between 1803 and 1820 can be seen in perspective when considered in the light of nature, aims and methods of the Village Itinerating Society which was a Dissenting initiative. It was a national, undenominational body founded in 1797 with the aim of spreading "the knowledge of Christ among the poor, by preaching the Gospel and teaching their children to read the scriptures." In 1803 the Society founded Hackney College to train men for the itinerant ministry. Students from the college helped John Fernie to mission Cannock. The Society was undenominational in the sense that converts were encouraged to remain loyal to their original religious affiliation, but since the ultimate aim of the itinerants was to plant churches where none existed, this was self-defeating and the itinerants incurred the wrath of the local clergy and persecution at the hands of the local mob because of their schismatic activities. The itinerant preachers were laymen whose board, travelling expenses and salary were paid for by the Society. Each itinerant was required to send monthly accounts of his activities and expenses to the Superintendent of the Society.⁷⁴ The itinerant was based on a large village in a populous area not served by the Church of England. It was his task to visit neighbouring hamlets and villages in order to make converts who could be gathered

into self-regulating societies which would eventually become self-sufficient churches with their own minister. When this was achieved the itinerant moved on to a new assignment. The itinerant was also expected to pave the way for tract distribution by founding either a Sunday School or an evening school where the scholars were taught to read. There were County Associations who pursued the same aims. Andrew Shawyer at Rugeley was employed by the Staffordshire Association of Congregational Ministers.

The only thing that Dissenting itinerants had in common with Wesleyan ones was that they travelled! The Wesleyan itinerant preacher was an ordained man who was part of a team of ministers responsible for all the societies in the circuit. The Dissenting itinerant was a layman who exercised a concentrated ministry on a limited number of villages and societies within a compact area. It was the Methodists who adopted some of the features of the Dissenting itinerant ministries. The Wesleyan Home Missionary from the 1850s onwards was appointed to a specific area of a circuit which was in decline with the aim of reviving existing societies and of planting new ones. He was supported by the Home Mission department and was expected to send the Secretary a monthly account of his work. Once his mission was accomplished he was sent to a new appointment. Primitive Methodist itinerants were also expected to keep a journal of their activities. Women, however, were allowed to become Primitive Methodist itinerants and did so until the 1840s when the number of women being stationed began to decline.⁷⁵ Elizabeth Bultitude was the last, superannuating in 1862.⁷⁶

The Methodist itinerant ministries on the Chase between 1803 and 1820 were the work of laymen. They were spontaneous affairs and were done voluntarily and free of charge with the result that they did not have financial constraints placed upon the location, duration and scope of their labours. Like their Dissenting counterparts, they sought to form

societies that would develop into churches - and since they worked at their time, at their own expense, and in their own localities, they had all the time in the world to pursue their aim.

4. From Cottage to Chapel and Community 1821-1836

By 1820 there were only four chapels to show for all the activity by the various Dissenting and Methodist bodies on the Chase since the 1770s. These were the Independent chapels at Cannock and Rugeley; and the Methodist chapels at Wyrley Bank and Brereton.

In 1816 the Methodists at Wyrley Bank decided to build a new chapel. There was a great deal of misgiving on the part of the older members, but once the decision had been made they were not allowed to change their minds since the young men of the society met early in the morning of the following day and pulled the old chapel down! The money to build the new chapel was loaned by William Shorter, described in White's directory as "grocer, draper, hatter, &c." He evidently regarded his loan as an investment for he would not allow the trustees to pay off any capital of the £300 they owed him. When the trustees finally over-ruled his objections in 1840 by announcing from the pulpit that they intended to hold a series of special preaching services at which collections would be taken to reduce the debt upon the chapel building, William Shorter left his usual pew in front of the gallery in a towering rage never to enter the place again.⁷⁷

On November 3, 1817, a house was registered for worship at Penkridge by the Methodist New Connexion.⁷⁸ The connexion was founded in 1797 by Alexander Kilham and sympathisers like William Smith following Kilham's expulsion from the Wesleyan Conference of 1796. Where John Wesley had firmly denied all authoritative supervision of the Methodist Connexion to laymen by placing it, on his death, in the hands of one hundred of the most senior travelling preachers, Kilham wanted lay delegates appointed to

Conference; the members of the local societies to appoint their own officials and not to have them appointed by the superintendent minister of the circuit as stipulated by John Wesley; and the local and travelling preachers to be recognised by the Quarterly Meetings.⁷⁹

In 1820, three years after the building of their new chapel, the Methodists at Wyrley Bank joined the New Connexion. Their traditions are strangely silent on the reasons for their change of allegiance. The decision of Conference in 1818 to call the travelling preachers "Reverend" may have offended the deeply ingrained dislike of any form of priesthood to be found in an extra-parochial settlement like Wyrley Bank and inclined them towards joining the more "republican" minded ranks of the New Connexion. There was certainly some kind republican tradition at Wyrley Bank for one of the local preachers living at Wyrley Bank - a farmer, and one of the numerous Poyner family to be found in the district - became a follower of Thomas Paine and renounced his Methodism in favour of "The Rights of Man."⁸⁰ Two Poyners - Thomas, a coal merchant; and Jeremiah, a book-keeper - were members of the new trust formed in 1822 to mark the break with the Wesleyan tradition. There was also the memory of the part played by William Smith in the founding of the original society and in the building of the original chapel.

To begin with Wyrley Bank remained a violent, vulgar village. The Poyner who renounced his Methodism in favour of Thomas Paine's "rights of man" took objection to a travelling tinker settling on what he claimed to be his farmland, and in ejecting the family from its squatter's croft handled the tinker's wife so roughly in throwing her over the boundary fence that surrounded the croft that he lamed her for life. Just as violent were the entertainments of the village. Bear-baiting, dog fights, and cock fights were all sports that were carried on in the village long after they had been banned elsewhere in the district.

Even the more seemingly harmless entertainments of Morris Dancing and Bilberry-pie feasts were occasions for riotous celebrations.⁸¹

By 1834 the character of the village had changed enough for it to become sufficiently self-respecting and decent to accept the responsibility of looking after its own poor by becoming a township linked to the Penkridge Union of Parishes under the new Poor Law Act of 1834. The situation was changed, according to White's Directory for 1834, by "The opening of the neighbouring coal mines [which] brought some respectable inhabitants to the place, who established a plan for relieving the poor, and have since erected a Methodist Chapel and Sunday School, so that the liberty is now nearly as civilised as its neighbours..⁸² The plan for relieving the poor must have included the Friendly Society which was founded in 1831 with John Hall, the cornmiller from Great Wyrley, as its treasurer. The Sunday School had been built in 1824 at "Wood's Lot" at the bottom of Wyrley Bank with the aid of a grant from the British School Authorities. It was let as a "Day School" to William Pratt and Aaron Buswell for a yearly rental of 70/-. Over at Wedges Mills was a school run by William Henshaw. He had been a farmer at Northfield near Birmingham until rheumatism crippled his hands and feet. He moved to Wedges Mills to join his son Thomas, his daughter Elizabeth, and his niece who was William Gilpin's wife. They were all Methodists who worshipped in the chapel at Wyrley Bank. Thomas became a successful edgetool manufacturer in his own right in Dublin. Elizabeth was a sincere, kind woman who exercised a great influence on the rough men who came to worship in the chapel. William Jones, a cordwainer, was a trustee of the chapel who had the thankless job of being the community's constable.⁸³ These were some of the respectable or educated and therefore reliable, responsible, soberly restrained, people who helped to

change the character of Wyrley Bank; and its name to Cheslyn Hay which was the ancient name of the part of the Chase to which it belonged.

Methodism's success in establishing its presence at Wyrley Bank bears out the general truth of an observation made by Thomas Taylor, a Travelling Preacher, about the York Circuit in 1780: "There is but little trade in any part of the Circuit; and where there is little trade, there is seldom much increase in religion. The people are chiefly farmers, and in general in a state of great bondage to their wealthy landlords, to whom they are a kind of vassals, and in general dread them more abundantly than they do their Maker..."⁸⁴ At Wyrley Bank, and the neighbouring villages of Great Wyrley, Churchbridge, and Wedges Mills there was a great deal of trade due to the industrial activities of William Gilpin who took advantage of the opportunities for trade opened up by the cutting of the Wyrley-Essington canal to the neighbourhood of Wyrley Bank, and the turnpiking of the Walsall to Stafford road as far as Churchbridge, to establish edge-tool works at Wedges Mills and Churchbridge, and to open up mines with wharves on the canal at Newtown, and at Churchbridge.

Tribute must also be paid to the character of William Gilpin. He was no more enlightened about the need to pay a living wage or to provide healthy working conditions for his workforce than his contemporaries, but he has gone down in the popular memory of the Methodists in the area as a man who did not abuse his position as the leading employer in the locality. Although not a particularly religious man, Gilpin was generous and kind-hearted. A lady taken suddenly ill in a coach, and unable to find suitable lodgings was given the hospitality of Gilpin's own home which stood opposite the inn where she was taken ill. She was nursed by Gilpin's wife and Elizabeth Henshaw until she died. One of Gilpin's most loyal, hardworking employees was a "ticket-of-leave" man who had been

spared transportation for his crime by the intervention of Gilpin. He was given the same work and the same wages as the other workers. Edward, one of Gilpin's sons, became a Methodist, and was successful in enticing his father to attend the occasional Methodist service but he died before he could persuade his father to become a Methodist. William Gilpin died in 1834.⁸⁵

Elsewhere on the Chase the Methodist societies had to struggle to establish themselves in their local communities. Despite plenty of trade, and the patronage of Elizabeth Birch, the society at Brereton was feeling threatened and insecure in 1834. Out of the original ten members of a trust formed in 1820 four had died, and the remaining six "so reduced by removals and poverty that for years past they have taken little interest in the management and that if some excellent individuals who are not trustees had not advanced the interest and not attended to the sittings and repairs the chapel must have been lost to the Connexion." One of these excellent individuals was John Scott - local preacher, farmer and butcher of Armitage - of whom the superintendent minister of the Stafford circuit, John Callaway wrote: "I know of no man of Mr.Scott's level in the Connexion who makes the effort to support Methodism in Brereton and neighbourhood that he does in that the burden falls wholly on him."⁸⁶ Matters came to a head in 1834 when the Earl of Shrewsbury gave some land on the opposite side of the road to the chapel as a site for an Anglican Chapel of Ease "for the accommodation of the people of that part of Rugeley parish and those of the contiguous parts of Longdon and Armitage... and persons the most competent to judge of local circumstances have no hesitation in saying that a spirit of opposition to Methodism characterises the enterprise."⁸⁷ To protect their own interests the Methodists at Brereton decided to form a new trust. The debt the new trust stood to inherit was £480. Elizabeth Birch must have felt that this was too much of a burden to place on the new trust for she

offered to cancel £100 of it if the Connexion would pay off another £180. John Callaway's handwriting is difficult to read but it seems as though the Chapel Relief Fund did eventually provide the £180 needed, half as a grant, and half as a loan.

Whilst the well established society at Brereton struggled for survival new chapels were being built. In 1821 a Wesleyan Methodist chapel was built in Penkridge.⁸⁸ In 1834 a Wesleyan Methodist chapel was built at Cannock Wood. Elizabeth Birch is credited with building the chapel at her own expense. An old pocket book contained an entry stating that the chapel was built for £84 at the sole expense of Elizabeth Birch, and that it was opened on June 7, 1834. The owner of the land, Bartholomew Craddock, would not sell the land to anyone but John Scott.⁸⁹ It was the Wesleyans who benefited eventually from the labours of John Benton at Essington where a chapel was built at Essington Wood in 1834.⁹⁰

In 1836 the Wesleyan Methodists erected "a neat little chapel." at Pelsall. The village was in the early stages of industrialisation. A large coalmine was sunk in the village in 1827 and an ironworks was established in 1832.⁹¹ The building of the chapel was the consummation of the work done in the village by Benjamin Whuley of Walsall. He was reared by an uncle "who was a worthy member of the Independent church in Walsall." Whuley was marked out by Mr. Groves, the pastor of the church, as a likely candidate for the Independent ministry, but a timid disposition and an aversion to the Calvinistic emphases of the Independent church's catechism led Whuley to resist the prompting of Mr. Groves. At this stage of his life Whuley was apprenticed to a Wesleyan local preacher called Towers who allowed Whuley and his three fellow apprentices to hold prayer-meetings in the workshop on a Sunday afternoon. One of them went on to become a Wesleyan minister and another to enter the Congregational ministry. Whuley became an ardent Methodist: "He energetically, yet modestly, persevered in assisting to establish

causes in Aldridge [where he formed a class of which he was "the faithful, indefatigable leader" for twenty years], Walsall Wood, and Pelsall; and seeing the deplorable state of the children, opened a Sabbath-school in each place. With other friends he held prayer-meetings at these neighbourhoods, occasionally delivering an exhortation or reading one of Mr. Wesley's sermons to the people..⁹² Like the famous Samuel Hick, who "travelled many scores of miles, and neither tasted meat nor drink till [he] got home in the evening",⁹³ Whuley for "many years.... denied himself the comfort of home, (often in the earlier time, satisfying himself with a crust of bread as he walked in the fields) to sow the word of eternal life in those barren places which now blossom as the rose." Whuley's opening of Sunday schools in each place he missioned shows his indebtedness to his Dissenting background and the way in which Methodism adopted the strategy of the Dissenting itinerants for their own use.

The leisurely pace at which Methodists, reliant on lay, cottage based ministries, could make the transition from cottage to chapel is shown in the varying number of years between the establishment of a society and the building of a chapel. In 1839 the Wesleyan Methodists who had been meeting in a cottage by the marl pits in Rugeley since 1809 felt strong enough to build a chapel in Lichfield Street.⁹⁴ Its building coincided with the development of Rugeley as an industrial town. The chief industry was the manufacture of hats but there were brick and lime kilns in operation in 1832, and a large brewery and two chemical works in 1834. The appearance of Rugeley reflected the growing prosperity of the town. In 1839 some of the old houses were rebuilt, and many new ones built - especially in Albion Street and in Church Street where the houses were reported to be well-built and elegant "being occupied by wealthy families and having neat lawns and pleasure grounds."⁹⁵

The Wesleyan chapel was not built at Cannock until 1842. William Cope, a native of Penkridge, arrived in Cannock in 1829 and set up in business as a draper and grocer. He gathered together a class of about eight to ten people which met in a small cottage where Rumer Hill Road joined the Walsall Road. At the age of thirty he became a local preacher. He had a distinguished career as a businessman, public servant, and reformer.⁹⁶ In 1840 he established a business in "the Potteries" with his brother. The fortunes of Cannock Methodism seemed to march hand-in-hand with Cope's personal fortunes for in 1842 a small chapel with its own cemetery was built in Girton Road (known as Podgy Lane in those days) not far from the cottage where the Independents had held their first cottage-meetings.⁹⁷ Methodist attempts to establish a footing in Rugeley were preceded by the Independents by sixteen years. In Cannock the Methodists preceded the Independents by two years but failed to establish a presence until the arrival of William Cope. The decisive factor was that the Independents were the first to erect a church in both Rugeley and Cannock and thus in a better position to attract the better class of people.

John Benton was involved in the building of the Wesleyan chapel at Great Wyrley in 1846. His nephew, William, laid the foundations of the society in 1810 when local preachers spent the time waiting at his house to be joined by other local preachers who had been conducting services on the Chase - before setting off for home in the Black Country in a body - in holding a prayer-meeting. In 1836 John Benton gave his nephew some land on the corner of Benton's Lane and Gorsey Lane as the site for a chapel but it was not built until 1846.⁹⁸ The prize for perseverance and tenacity, however, must go to the Methodists at Aldridge. They were first mentioned in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* in connection with the loss of property sustained by the Methodists of Wednesbury, Darlaston, and West Bromwich during the anti-Methodist riots of February 1744. The paper said of the mob that

"the goods they took from Aldridge were forced from them by the Walsall people as they were bringing them to that Town, and restor'd to their proper owners." There appears to be no other mention of them in the records available until the building of the chapel in Walsall Wood Road in 1850! Again the improved fortunes of the Methodists was linked to the growing industrialisation of the district as limestone mining, brick and tile manufacturing, and coal mining began to flourish.⁹⁹

The transition from cottage to chapel based societies involved accepting a burden of debt for the chapel. This burden could be reduced by obtaining land cheaply for the site of the chapel either as a gift or at a reduced price. Patronage of influential local people was needed to counteract any opposition to the building of the chapel, otherwise the site of the chapel may have been in an inaccessible place which discouraged people from attending. Someone was needed who was willing to invest money in the building of the chapel and trustees were needed who were willing to accept responsibility for discharging the debt upon the chapel. The size and wealth of the local population were important because the building of a chapel was a sign of respectability, and if respectable people were willing to pay pew rents for the privilege of attending worship then the problem of raising money to pay off the debt or to meet the mortgage payments was eased. In developing industrial regions like the Chase there was always the threat of fluctuations in trade leading to the movement of people away from the area in search of work and reducing the membership of the chapel.

Building a chapel was not necessarily beneficial for the Society could be so distracted by the need to meet its financial obligations that it could forget or be diverted from its evangelical mission. A lot depended upon the motive for the building of the chapel. The one at Brereton served as a base for Thomas Gething's itinerant ministry in the

area. A regular building for worship could, however, distance the Methodists from the local community. A lot depended on the quality and evangelical fervour of individual Methodist leadership within the local societies. One way to bridge the gap was by using the oldest form of personal evangelism in Christianity - conversation evangelism. William Marshall was the village blacksmith who had opened his house at Great Wyrley for cottage-meetings from the earliest days. He had the gift of conversation evangelism. One of his most notable converts was Joseph Wootton who went on to give a lifetime of devoted service to the cause of Methodism in the village. The two men spent one Saturday night having a long talk in William Marshall's smithy. The next day Joseph Wootton made a public confession of his faith at the penitent form in the chapel.¹⁰⁰ The other prominent member who was skilled in conversation evangelism was Mrs. Payne. She was a dressmaker who came from Bloxwich to settle in the village with her husband John, a bitmaker who "was more at home in a public house than in a chapel." It was said in memory of Mrs. Payne: "She came from Walsall as a lovely and cultured young lady, associated herself with the church and started business as a grocer and dressmaker. Her business ability was most remarkable, and her devotion to religious work was even greater. She married but had no children, though it was said of her that she mothered more children than any other woman in Wyrley. She had special times set apart for visiting the poor and sick, and was more in demand than any minister or priest. With her sewing and her Methodist gospel, she went wherever she was needed, even as far as Norton."¹⁰¹

5. Conclusion

Some of the features of Methodist growth identified in the first chapter can be seen in the growth of Methodism on Cannock Chase. The evangelical zeal to share one's faith with others together with the mobility characteristic of the period are illustrated by the

experience of Sarah Cooper. She was born in 1811 in the hamlet of Wood Bank, near Penkridge. Her parents "though poor, were honest and industrious" and encouraged their intelligent but delicate daughter to improve her mind through reading whatever books she could obtain. She was a devout Anglican and "was a regular worshipper at the parish church of her native village up to the year 1824 when she removed to Wolverhampton, to reside with a pious and devoted relative." This relative appears to have been a Methodist for while in Wolverhampton she began to attend Wesleyan services at which "the plain and heart searching sermons to which she listened" opened her young mind to "her condition as a sinner before God, and her inability to make expiation for her sin. She felt distressed in her mind, and in this state anxiously sought advice from the friend with whom she resided. The great atonement which Christ had made for sin was set before her, and she was exhorted to rely upon Him by faith that she might obtain the forgiveness of sin. She began now more carefully to read the Bible for herself, often upon her knees in secret, and thereby she more clearly understood the important truths which had previously been mentioned to her, and was enabled by faith to cast her guilty soul upon the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ." To consolidate her newly won faith she joined the Wesleyans and began to attend the class-meetings and the prayer-meetings. She returned home in 1825 and lost no time in inviting the Methodist preacher stationed at Stafford to hold services in her home. She eventually moved to Stafford to work for a pious family there, married, and transferred her allegiance to the Methodist New Connexion.¹⁰² Sarah Cooper is a classic example of the kind of evangelical conversion and the kind of evangelical converting zeal that Methodism wanted to promote and to encourage.

There are glimpses of the rowdiness and folk religion of revivalism in the experience of John Benton. Despite being a man of some wealth and property Benton was an uncouth

man despised by some for his lack of education. Benton, however, was a powerful, effective preacher. What must be an apocryphal story recounts how he preached one Good Friday in the Brownhills area on the text, "It is finished!" with such compelling power that a large part of the congregation became so convicted of their sin and unbelief that "some groaned, some shrieked, some fell from their seats." Benton came down from the pulpit to pray with those labouring so desperately under their conviction of eternal damnation. He could not resist from turning to one local preacher present who was a persistent critic of his uncouth language to say, "This is grammar."¹⁰³ And there is a glimpse of the supernatural world the Methodists inhabited in the tale that Murderer's Lane at Great Wyrley was so named because it was there that Johnny Benton shot the devil!¹⁰⁴

The growth of Methodism on the Chase was typical, therefore, of the general growth of Methodism. It also illustrates the growing inability of the Itinerant Preachers to fulfil their original calling to be mobile evangelists as the increasing number of chapels demanded a greater concentration of their energies on those urban centres which provided the wealth to finance the expansion of Methodism. The main method for colonizing Cannock Chase between 1776 and 1836 was the itinerant ministries of local preachers like Thomas Gething, Benjamin Whuley, John Benton and Sampson Turner promoting popular, cottage based, praying revivalism.

The organisation of Methodism provided a simple, flexible system for promoting this kind of growth by combining "a strong centralised authority at the top with considerable autonomy at the bottom."¹⁰⁵ This autonomy at the local level provided tremendous scope for the common people to discover powers of initiative and leadership in keeping with the spirit of the age. John Kent has pointed out perceptively that "The whole eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival in England was ... further evidence of a new

emphasis on the autonomous self which was the deeper characteristic of the period."¹⁰⁶ A writer in the Methodist Magazine for 1852 declared proudly: "Methodism is remarkable for the extent to which it has ever sought to render the various gifts of its members conducive to the enlargement of the Kingdom of Christ; and it is admitted that no other system has so largely evoked, and so extensively called into holy and beneficent activity, the lay energies of a great religious community."¹⁰⁷ This panegyric should be compared with the verdict of Abel Stevens on the role of laymen in the expansion of Methodism in England and in the New World: "in few things was the legislative wisdom of Wesley more signalized than in providing in his ecclesiastical system the offices of local preacher and class leader, a species of lay pastorate which, alike in the dense communities of England and the dispersed populations of America, has performed services which can hardly be overrated. The history of the denomination affords a lesson in this respect that should never be forgotten by Methodists while Christianity has a frontier anywhere on our planet."¹⁰⁸

Endnotes

1. *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Volume 5 (1959) p.102
2. *Cannock Advertiser* 05/12/1921)
3. C.Whitehouse, "Notes on Methodism at Cheslyn Hay." (1856) Document in Cannock Chase Circuit Safe.
4. R.P.Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory: Reflections upon Early Methodism* (1989), 9
5. R.Millward and A.Robinson, *The Landscapes of Britain: The West Midlands* (1971), 80
6. F.W.Willmore, *History of Walsall*, 377-378
7. A.Everett, *The Pattern of Rural Dissent: The Nineteenth Century* (1972), 16
8. M.B.Rowlands, *The West Midlands from A.D.1000* (1987), 116
9. D.Hay, "Poaching and Game Laws on Cannock Chase" in Hay et al, editors, *Albion's Fatal Tree* (1972), 224
10. Wright, *The Friendship of Cannock Chase*, 99
11. R.H.Martin, "Evangelical Dissenters and Wesleyan-Style Itinerant Ministries at the End of the Eighteenth Century." *Methodist History*, Volume 16 (1978), 171
12. J. Vickers, "Methodism and Society in Central Southern England 1740-1857" (Southampton University Ph.D. thesis 1897), 97
13. *The Wesley Banner and Revival Record*, 1850, 241-243
14. J.Vickers, "Circuit Life in 1825" in T.Macquiban, editor, *Methodism in its Cultural Milieu* (1994), 165
15. Charles Wesley introduced Methodism to the Black Country at Wednesbury and Darlaston in 1742. John Wesley gained fresh converts at West Bromwich the following year. All three groups met at Wednesbury until 1760 when a chapel was built at Wednesbury. The Darlaston and West Bromwich Methodists began to meet separately. A chapel was built at Darlaston in 1761, and an existing chapel built by James Wheatley (a former Methodist Preacher) at West Bromwich was acquired in 1764. The first Methodist chapel to be built in the Black Country, however, was at Tipton Green in 1755. The Methodists at Dudley had separated from

those at Tipton Green in 1749 and built their own chapel in 1764. Roger Leese. "The Impact of Methodism on Black Country Society, 1742-1860" (University of Manchester Ph.D thesis, 1972), 69-76

16. *Cannock Advertiser* 05/12/1921

17. Henry Sanders, *History of Shenstone* (1794) cited F.W.Hackwood, *Staffordshire Customs and Superstitions and Folklore* (1924), 21 18.A.C.Pratt, "Bits of the Old Black Country - Characters and Carousels of Cheslyn Hay" in *The Midland Counties Express* (1883)

19.E.Homeshaw & R.Sambrook, *Great Wyrley 1051-1951* (1951), 21

20.C.Whitehouse in his notes on Methodism at Cheslyn Hay written in 1856

21.C.Whitehouse writing as "Antiquarian" in the *Cannock Advertiser* 02/07/1881

22.William Smith is a significant figure in the history of Methodism. He played a prominent part in establishing the Methodist New Connexion in 1797. He was born at Walsall in 1763: "His parents were of the excellent of the earth, and they instructed him in the way of truth and piety. In early life he was converted to God, and while a youth he began to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. He was frequently called to address large congregations in Wolverhampton, and was made very useful in its adjacent villages.. Providence favoured him with temporal prosperity, but he was not puffed up thereby." In 1793 he removed to Hanley: "In the year 1797, he attended the Leeds Conference as a trustee representative, and finding the preachers determined to hold fast, and exercise absolute power, he united with the riends of a liberal constitution, in forming the Methodist New Connexion. On his return to Hanley, he opened his house for the worship of God. There the gospel was preached till a more convenient place was obtained. In the year 1789, through close application to business and study his health began to fail" He lived to see the new chapel opened before dying in February 1799 aged 35 years. Samuel Hulme et al, editors, *The Jubilee of the Methodist New Connexion* (1847), 302-303

23.A.P.Sell, "George Burder and The Lichfield Dissenters" *Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeological Society*, Volume 13

(1972), 389 & Roger H.Martin, *Evangelicals United: Ecumenical Stirrings in Pre-Victorian Britain, 1795-1830* (Scarecrow, 1983), 206

24. *Victoria County History*, Volume VI (1979), 252

25.A.G.Matthews, *The Congregational Churches of Staffordshire* (1924), 132-135

26.D.W.Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the Transformation of English Dissent, 1780-1830* (1988), 29

27.W.C. Braithwaite, *The Beginning of Quakerism* (1953) 12 [The Society of Friends was itself disseminated throughout the British Isles and beyond by itinerant preachers beginning with the call of John Fox at some time between the end of 1648 and the beginning of 1649 to go abroad in the world. In the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1st the Rector of Houghton-le-Spring Bernard Gilpin, was given " a genral license of preaching" in other priests parishes. J.S.Simon. *John Wesley and the Methodist Societies* (1923), 72-73]

28.The relevant entries are in B.Donaldson, "The Registration of Dissenting Chapels and Meeting Houses in Staffordshire, 1689-1852." *Staffordshire Historical Collections* 4th series

29.Matthews, *Congregational Churches*, 129

30.G.Key, *Records of One Hundred Years of Congregationalism in Rugeley* (1897), 19-21

31.Hugh McLeod writes of the liberal legislation "designed to lift all restrictions on the freedom of the market, and to produce a population of free, mobile, competitive individualists, in an economy founded on the sanctity of private property." in *Religion and the People of Western Europe 1789-1970* (1981), 23

32. Martin, "Evangelical Dissenters and Wesleyan-style Itinerant Ministries...", 170

33. J.S.Simon, *John Wesley and the Methodist Societies* (1937), 71

34. J.Vickers, "Good Red Herring", *Proceedings Wesley Historical Society*, Volume XLVII (1989), 90

35.M.Wright, "Romance of Cannock Chase through the Centuries No.XV Survey of Waste Lands of Cannock Parish in 1759." *Cannock Circuit Magazine*.

36.W.Clowes, *The Journals of William Clowes, A Primitive Methodist Preacher* (1844. reprinted 1980), 96

37. *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* 1830, 789 & Harry Thornton's notes on the Craddock family

38.A.Williams, *Sketches in and around Lichfield and Rugeley* (1892), 57

39.Donaldson, "The Registration of Dissenting Chapels .." entries 129, 210, 226 & 230

40.Trust deeds in Cannock Methodist Circuit Safe. Thomas Birch and his sister Elizabeth were staunch members of the Congregational church but this did not prevent Elizabeth Birch from being a woman of broad sympathies who tried to bring the Methodists and the Congregationalists in the area together. To this end the Congregational minister at Stafford, John Chalmers, was invited to preach in the Methodist chapel at Brereton soon after its opening for public worship. A secession of the majority of the Congregational members at Stafford to the Methodists in 1803, however, had not helped the relationship between the two bodies, and it is

not surprising that Elizabeth Birch's efforts to bring the two bodies together failed, whereupon she allied herself to the Methodists because she probably believed that the evangelical cause to which she was so committed would be better served by the Methodists than by the Independents. To further the spread of Methodism she became a great patron of chapels in small villages. Besides providing the loan for the building of the chapel at Brereton she also built the Methodist chapels at Longdon (in 1832) and Colton at her own expense. When she died in 1842 the Brereton society still owed her £97 of the mortgage and £3 interest. The debt was cancelled in her will. *Christian Miscellany* 1846, 92-93 & relevant trust deeds 41. *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 68. John Simpson, the parish clerk of Brewood, resigned from his office in 1800 and registered a cottage in the village for nonconformist worship. His sister had married a London man by the name of John Neale who provided the funds needed to build a small chapel in 1803. Because of his influence the chapel at Brewood "became a centre for the mission work of Hackney College students during vacations." *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 45

42. Donaldson, "Registration of Meeting Houses...", entries 627, 642 & 778.

43. C. Whitehouse, "Memories of Old Cannock" *Cannock Advertiser* 01/03/1890

44. Matthews, *Congregational Churches of Staffordshire*, 173

45. The members were: Mary Shawyer, Catherine Sleigh (the widow of Samuel who died in 1796) Elizabeth Sleigh (daughter), Ann Pinson, Ann Clarke, William Wooley, Edward Arthur, Jane Jamison, Samuel Ormson, Mary Higgitt, Michael Nixon, and Elizabeth Adler.

46. Donaldson, "Registration of Meeting Houses...", entries 252, 311, 442, 446, 610 & 680.

47. Key, *Records of One Hundred Years of Congregationalism at Rugeley*, 19-21

48. White's *Directory of Staffordshire for 1834*, 490 lists D. Buxton as one of three shopkeepers at Cheslyn Hay.

49. *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 68 & Donaldson, "Registration of Meeting Houses...", entry 195

50. J. H. Whiteley, *Wesley's Anglican Contemporaries* (1939), 63-64

51. C. Whitehouse, "Recollections of Old Cannock" *Cannock Advertiser* 29/03/1890

52. H. B. Kendall. *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* Volume 1 (n.d.), 96-97

53. Donaldson, "Registration of Meeting Houses...", entry 296

54. Information courtesy of Harry Thornton of Brereton.

55. Donaldson, "Registration of Meeting Houses...", entry 246

56. Clowes, *Journal*, 109

57. M. Wright. ("Pitman"), "James Turner tells of the Pocket Venus" in *The Friendship of Cannock Chase* (1935), 96

58. *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 69 & Donaldson, "Registration of Meeting Houses..." entry 307

59. Clowes, *Journal*, 109 & J. T. Wilkinson. *William Clowes 1780-1851* (1951), 35

60. Kendall, *Origins and History of Primitive Methodist Connexion*, Volume. I, 134

61. *ibid.*, 169

62. Minutes and Roll Book of the Darlaston P.M. Circuit for 1827. *Darlaston (Slater Street)* 42/1/1 [Walsall Local History Archives]

63. *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 69

64. M. Wright, *The Friendship of Cannock Chase*, 99-100

65. Donaldson, "Registration of Meeting Houses...", entries 489 & 546.

66. Kendall, *Origins and History of Primitive Methodist Connexion*, Volume. I, 98

67. J. S. Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History* (Wisconsin 1984), 79

68. E. D. Graham, "Chosen by God: the female travelling preachers of early Primitive Methodism in England" in T. Macquiban, editor, *Methodism In Its Cultural Milieu* (1994), 86

69. H. Bourne, "History of Primitive Methodism" in *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, 1822, 163

70. Werner, 83. [Benton was also responsible for the nickname given to the Primitive Methodists for it was at Belper that the movement became known as the Ranters because their noisy, rather vulgar theatrical style of missioning, with large processions singing their way round the streets to draw attention to themselves, reminded people of the original Ranters.]

71. Kendall, *Origins and History of Primitive Methodist Connexion*, Volume. I, 520

72. *ibid.*, 353

73. *ibid.*, 356

74. Martin, "Evangelical Dissenters and Wesleyan-style Itinerant Ministries...", 169-174

75. E. D. Graham, "Chosen by God: The Female Travelling Preachers of Early Primitive Methodism" *Proceedings*, Volume 49, Part 3 (1993),

76. *ibid.*, 77

77. Whitehouse, "Notes on Methodism..."

78. Donaldson, "Registration of Meeting Houses..", entry 622
79. H.B. Workman et al, *A New History of Methodism*, Volume I (1909), 490-494
80. A.C. Pratt, "Bits of the Old Black Country - Characters and Carousels of Cheslyn Hay. " in *Midland Counties Express* 1883 , 183
81. Pratt, 182-184
82. White, *Directory for Staffordshire, 1834*. 490
83. A.C. Pratt, "...Characters and Carousels of Cheslyn Hay...", 185
84. T. Jackson, editor, *The Lives of the Early Preachers*, Volume V (1866), 56
85. E. Homeshaw, "Gilpin Moves His Men to Local Iron and Coal." in *Cannock Advertiser*, February, 1953. [Pratt, Cutting Roads To Fortune With Edge Tools, Part IV. "From Brade's Mill To Churchbridge." (11/10/1881), 131-133]
86. John Scott was born in the west of Ireland about 1790. Political unrest with its attendant dangers of rebellion drove him to emigrate to England whilst still a young boy. He landed in England with 6d in his pocket. He had marked ability for after a spell as farm bailiff for Bishop Bagot of Blithfield he apprenticed himself to Mr. Sergeant of Fulford in order to learn the butchery business. Mr. Sergeant was a Methodist local preacher and recruited John Scott as a local preacher by asking him to supply some of his appointments in his place. After setting up in business on his own in Brereton Scott married the daughter of Mr. Aldritt of Church Farm at Armitage whose considerable wealth he eventually inherited "and as a butcher, farmer, and gentleman wielded a mighty influence for the glory of God and Methodism in Brereton and district." [*Methodist Recorder* 30/8/1909 courtesy of Harry Thornton of Brereton]
87. Correspondence is in Trust Wallet for Brereton (Cannock Methodist Circuit. Safe) It is possible that Callaway was exaggerating the Anglican threat to the chapel in the interests of forming a new trust, for Brereton was not formed into a separate parish until 1843, and the church (St. Michael's) was not consecrated until August 1837. It was part of the initiative launched by the Church Building Association founded by Dr. Henry Ryder, the evangelical Bishop of Lichfield (1824-1836): "After eight years there were twenty new churches and ten under construction." K. Hylson-Smith. *Evangelicals in the Church of England 1734-1984* (1988), 69-70
88. Donaldson, "Registration of Meeting Houses...", entry 867
89. *Lichfield Mercury* 15/6/1934. courtesy of Harry Thornton.
90. Anon. *Essington Wood Methodist Church 1834-1987* (1987) The original cottage-meetings were held in the house of the Horton family known as The Croft in Bursnips Road.
91. White, *Directory for Staffordshire* 1851, 155
92. *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* 1863, 232
93. W.D. Lawson, *Wesleyan Local Preachers* (1874), 123
94. Williams. *Sketches in and around Lichfield and Rugeley*, 339
95. *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 149
96. As a businessman he was an original shareholder of the Cannock and Rugeley Colliery Company, director and chairman of the West Cannock Colliery Company, and chairman of the Cannock Gas company. For twenty years he was a member of the Board of Guardians, and he was a member of the Cannock Local Board for fourteen years. He served for six years as people's church-warden. He played a prominent part in introducing early closing hours in Cannock. *Cannock Advertiser* July 1890
97. C. Whitehouse, "Recollections of Old Cannock" in *Cannock Advertiser* 01/03/1890
98. T. Sambrook, *A Short History of Wesleyan Methodism at Great Wyrley* (1925), 12
99. J.T. Gould, *Men of Aldridge* (1957), 86
100. Sambrook, *Wesleyan Methodism at Great Wyrley*, 22
101. *ibid.*, 13
102. *The Methodist New Connexion Magazine* 1850, 153 -155
103. J. Ritson, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism* (1909), 110
104. Wright, *Friendship of Cannock Chase*, 222
105. A. Macquibban, "Ministerial or Lay Aristocracy? A Study of Methodist Church Polity from its antecedents and development from the death of John Wesley to The Form of Discipline 1791-1797" (Bristol University M.A. thesis 1986), 43
106. J. Kent, *The Unacceptable Face: The Modern Church in the Eyes of the Historian* (1987), 110
107. *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* 1852, 764
108. A. Stevens *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (nd), 175]

Chapter Six

THE METHODIST COLONIZATION OF THE CHASE:1836-1879

1. The Logarithm of Growth

The aim of this chapter is to describe the colonization of the Chase by Anglicans and Methodists using the same basic pattern of growth, that of multiplication by division. The principle of promoting growth by sub-division was the traditional device of the Methodist circuit system. It was a basic pattern of growth going back to Roman Christianity's colonization of England and Wales. Thus, the word "parish", according to Paul Welsby, was used originally to denote a local community of Christians centred in a town and its surrounding countryside under the supervision of a bishop who stood in the same relation to the community as the rector or vicar of a modern parish: "It was to the town with its cathedral church that the Christians in the surrounding countryside looked for their worship and pastoral care. The bishop was assisted by priests who were his assistants at Baptism and Mass, and by deacons who were his chief administrative agents."¹ The increase in the number of Christians in the bishop's parish made it necessary to have other church buildings besides the cathedral. These buildings were Minsters served by communities of clerics to the number of eleven with the missionary functions of serving the Christian communities in the surrounding villages over a wide and not clearly defined area. These clerics "led semi-community lives and their pastoral duties consisted in baptizing, teaching, ministering to the sick, and supervising those under public penance." The Minsters in their turn established small oratories in the outlying parts of their parishes to serve individual villages. These oratories were served by one priest, assisted perhaps by a curate, "who divided his time between liturgical duties and pastoral work, supervising the farming of his

glebe in the intervals between the two duties." From the Fourth Century the word "parish" which had originally denoted what is now called a diocese was used to denote the "sub-divisions of the diocese."²

Methodism gradually assumed the character of the early Anglican parishes from the final decades of the eighteenth century. Wesley and his preachers to begin with ignored the towns and concentrated on the villages. In evangelising Cornwall Wesley avoided certain of the major towns for a variety of reasons. According to G.C. Probert he "preached all round Penzance but avoided entering it. He may have preferred to preach to the Penzance people on the outskirts of the town to avoid persecution." Truro was avoided "because he did not wish to clash with the work of the evangelical curate, Samuel Walker." What Wesley and his preachers did was to establish Methodism "in pockets in the county, and...these pockets gradually expanded until all the areas were linked together."³ In Staffordshire pockets of Methodism were established around Wednesbury in the south and Hanley in the north. Where Methodism was established in a town then, in due course, a pattern of growth similar to that of Anglicanism (ie using the term as a synonym for the early English church) took place. Methodism was introduced to Preston by Martha Thompson in 1775. She was a native of the town who had moved to London to work as a domestic servant. While in the city she was converted under the preaching of John Wesley whom she persuaded to take her back to Preston on the back of his horse! She set up in business and persuaded a neighbour to open her upper-room above her ale-house for Methodist meetings. The neighbour, her son, and Martha Thompson became the nucleus of the Methodist Society in Preston. Between 1775 and 1781 four outstanding young men joined the Society - Michael Emmett, William Bramwell, Richard Crane and Moses Holden. These four energetic, gifted young men devoted themselves to preaching the Gospel in the

thirty odd villages found in the "large stretch of country on the North-west side of the River Ribble, extending over the Fylde District to Bleasdale Moors and to the hills of Upper Wyresdale on the East, and to Lancaster on the North..".⁴ In this way urban Methodism took on the features of the early parishes with "one circuit, a single chapel, and numerous preaching rooms [covering] the town and outlying areas."¹⁴ At Tuckingmill in Cornwall there were 453 members distributed among eleven classes two of which were in Tuckingmill and the other nine in outlying villages. Of these nine classes only one did not become an independent Society with its own chapel.¹⁵

The Religious Census of 1851 which revealed that the total attendances of the Nonconformists on the census Sunday exceeded that of the Anglicans by 301,464, and that Wesleyan Methodism was the largest Nonconformist body⁷ seems to have encouraged one Wesleyan Preacher to write: "We have, in a way, mapped the country into "Districts", answering somewhat to Bishoprics; as you know, these Districts we divide into "Circuits" or parishes..⁸ In 1903 W.B.Fitzgerald identified the circuit system with the Anglican parish system: "The circuit is the Methodist parish. A Methodist atlas -and there is or was such a thing - takes in every acre of Great Britain and Ireland. Snowdon, Helvellyn, Dartmoor, Epping Forest - no corner is left out. The loneliest shepherd's hut among the hills of Wales or Scotland is in some circuit or other, and all the chapels and preaching places within the area of a given circuit are linked together under one common government."⁹ There was one sense in which the comparison was valid - in the functional definition of a parish as "a unit of organisational and missionary outreach within the Anglican ecclesiastical system."¹⁰ This definition can apply equally well to the circuit within the Methodist ecclesiastical system. It links them both with their common origins as a system of missionary outreach involving a process of initial colonisation of an area

followed by its sub-divisions into smaller areas which repeat the administrative features of the larger parent body.

The principle of sub-division of circuits did not work in Wesleyan Methodism's favour. The growing strength and prosperity of urban Methodism with an urban based ministry created an unfortunate gap between town and countryside which led to unfavourable sub-divisions of circuits. James Everett denounced the self-interest of the superintendent minister, George Marsden, and the circuit stewards of the Stockport Circuit behind the formation of the New Mills Circuit in 1808: "Stockport was the pie which Mr. Marsden had prepared for himself and those of his own class and New Mills the parings taken from the edges."¹¹ The consequences of such a selfish policy were described by Frederick Jobson in 1873 when he said that many of the village circuits had a bad reputation among the Travelling Preachers because they were the "fag-ends of Town-Circuits, cut off because found cumbersome in working [and] instead of being duly provided for in finance... mostly left to struggle for subsistence.." As a result of their poverty such circuits "sank in status.. and in the class of minister appointed to them."¹² The general condescension with which rural circuits and their ministers were regarded by "successful" Wesleyan ministers was expressed in this comment on W.O. Simpson's appointment to the Great Horton Circuit in Yorkshire: "... it seems a pity that he was sent where his magnificent gifts were comparatively wasted... all that was needed here, for three sabbaths out of every four, was a minister of average good sense, with a kind heart, having adequate qualifications in leg and lung..¹³

The local preachers who had been the cutting edge of Wesleyan Methodist expansion in the countryside became demoralised in some areas of the country. Between 1796 and 1799 Marshall Claxton had employed his Sundays "in many of the dark villages for ten

miles around [Yarm] in calling sinners to repentance. In this work God graciously owned my feeble labours. Several small societies were raised of ten or twelve members, and the way was prepared for the regular ministry to visit them.¹⁴ Unfortunately the regular ministry began to neglect the rural Societies in order to concentrate on serving the pulpits of the urban chapels. The Wesleyan Minehead and Dunster Circuit fell topographically into the valley or seaboard round consisting of Dunster, Watchett, Williton, Washford and Carhampton; and the exacting hill round consisting of Alcombe, Porlock, Cutcombe, Bridgtown, Exford, Winsford and Withypool. "The ministers' itineraries were considerably modified in later days "says A.G.Pointon, "by 1864-5 the general hill country rounds were being made only once a quarter by each circuit minister."¹⁵ Pointon's analysis of the services conducted on the circuit plan between 1865 and 1867 shows that 75% of them were taken by local preachers - most of them in the hill country Societies: Dunster-50%; Watchett-53%; Williton 56%; Washford-57%; Carhampton-57%; Alcombe-77%; Porlock-83%; Cutcombe-90%; and Bridgtown, Exford, Withypool and Winsford - 93%.¹⁶ In such areas some of the local preachers followed the example of the ministers and began to neglect their rural appointments. In 1873 it was reported that a Society in a West Country village of some 700 inhabitants was growing disheartened because it had only one Sunday service, and a monthly week night service. The local preachers failed to keep their appointments at least almost every other Sunday, and sometimes three Sundays in a row. Ministers preached in the village only twice a quarter.¹⁷ In 1875 the Wesleyan Kirkby Stephen and Appleby Circuit preachers' meeting "heard with sorrow that many of the brethren have failed to attend to their preaching appointments on the plan..."¹⁸

To begin with the Anglicans pursued the Methodist policy of multiplying by dividing. They sub-divided large parishes into smaller ones in order to provide better pastoral care

for rapidly increasing populations. Towards the end of the nineteenth century this strategy was abandoned in favour of having resident curates in various parts of a large parish under the guidance of its incumbent. This dispensed with the need to "reproduce the entire parochial ministry several times over."¹⁹ This was the strategy adopted by the parish of Cannock in the seventh decade of the nineteenth century. Mission churches were established at Huntington in 1872, Heath Hayes in 1874, and Bridgtown in 1876.²⁰ In the nineteenth century, then, the Anglicans and Methodists moved in opposite directions. The revival of the Anglican parish resulted in the rediscovery of the parish as a unit of missionary outreach as well as a unit of administration whilst the decline of the Methodist circuit system set in as Methodism moved from the circuit as a unit of missionary outreach to a unit of administration!

2. The Renewal of the Anglican Parish

A new breed of Churchmen emerged in the middle decades of the nineteenth century: "For churchmen the years in the middle of the nineteenth century were years of spiritual revival. During this time more of the clergy and laity saw their religion in a clearer outline and allowed its dogmas to exercise more direct control over their lives than had possibly been the case since 1700. There was a considerable revival of parish life and there were probably fewer neglected parishes than there had been for centuries."²¹ In Staffordshire licences for the non-residence of clergymen fell from 46 in 1804 to 10 in 1824. In 1844 there were five licenses issued, and in 1864 only one.²² A new breed of Bishops dedicated to improving the efficiency of their dioceses, and the quality of their confirmations and ordinations; and a new breed of professional clergymen imbued with a genuine sense of vocation were responsible for the revival.²³ The Rev'd J.Finch, M.A., the Vicar of Aldridge, was one of this new breed of churchmen. The building of the Wesleyan

Methodist chapel at Aldridge in 1851 incurred his displeasure which was expressed in the following forthright terms: "It is an unhappy reflection that any member of the church should have been found here willing to give even sixpence towards the foundation of that which cannot be, at the best, anything but the cause of strife and dissension amongst us."²⁴

Finch was the first incumbent of what had been left of the original parish of Aldridge after its sub-division in 1849 into the parishes of Aldridge and Great Barr. He was dedicated utterly to the welfare of his parish. He rebuilt the north aisle and chancel of the parish church, and restored and improved the rest of the building at a cost of £1,056 to which he contributed £250. At the re-opening of the church the village held a general holiday and 170 parishioners sat down to lunch. Over the years Finch added ten stained glass windows to the one already installed in the church, introduced a surpliced choir, created a more reverent behaviour in church, improved the knowledge of the scriptures, instilled a keener sense of the duty of churchmanship, and a greater willingness to give alms. He also did everything he could to discourage schism in his parish. Not only did he vehemently oppose the building of the Methodist chapel but he also barred Nonconformists from the benefits of the local charities, and their children from attending the village school.²⁵ Finch was not alone in his aggressive attitude towards the Methodists in his parish. There were others like Finch who required Methodist children to attend their Sunday schools if they wanted to keep their places in the Anglican Day schools; and gave their preference to Anglican worshippers in selection for field employment and for the reception of village doles and bounties. At Littlebury in Herefordshire the parish priest was petty enough to discontinue the dole of broth to the woman who opened her house for Methodist cottage meetings.²⁶

Finch's antagonism towards any form of Dissent in his parish; his emphases on reverence in worship, and on the visible and external signs of devotion; and the

conscientious manner in which he discharged his parish duties reflect the influence of the Oxford movement within the mid-Victorian Anglican church.²⁷ The Tractarians themselves had been preceded by the Evangelical movement which had "anticipated the more general mid-Victorian clerical emphasis on professionalism, vigorous parochial requirements and pastoral innovation" by their forceful emphasis of the importance of Holy Communion, the Prayer Book, and of Church order.²⁸ Desmond Bowen attributed this "golden age of pastoral work" in pre-1914 England to the active debate between clergy and laity on the mission of the Church to society.²⁹ This debate was given impetus and urgency by the challenge to the monopoly of the Church of England by radical politics emphasising the rights of man and equal representation, and an alliance between liberal politics and rational Dissent aimed at the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts which restricted the part played in national life by Nonconformist.³⁰ Furthermore the hold of the Church of England on the allegiance of the people was being challenged in the growing towns and villages, and in the new, isolated communities of miners springing up of in moorland and forest, by the hastening spread of Methodism with its strong centralised organisation and its national network of preachers and societies.³¹

The aim of renewal was to preserve the established deferential order of English society by restoring the life of the ideal country parish in which there had been "a happy subordination of classes" under the benevolent supervision of squire and parson "based on the patriarchal village family of all degrees: the father worked, the mother saw to the house, the food, and the clothes; from the parents the children learnt the crafts and industries necessary for their livelihood, and on Sundays they went together, great and small, to worship in the village church."³² The parish, however, was changing as people became more educated, informed and ambitious. The traditional methods of inculcating

contentment with one's lot, and of personal piety through sermons, homilies, catechising, and pastoral visitation needed new methods and aids like Sunday schools; Day schools; the distribution of cheap tracts, bibles and prayer-books; bible-reading groups and cottage lectures; coal and clothing clubs; allotments; and district visiting societies: "By the end of the forties any good parish might be expected to maintain the following: infant, day, evening and Sunday schools; weekly lecture (Monday. Wednesday or Friday at 6 p.m.), singing class, and Sunday lecture (2 p.m. in the vestry); parochial library; school, coal and rice funds; Provident Society (combining Savings Club, Clothes Club, and Sick Benefit Society); Baby Linen Society; allotments; and a branch of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel."³³ These emphases on regular preaching during the week, the provision of religious literature, the education of children, charitable activities and evangelistic concern were all part of that concept of High Church revival which John Wesley had inherited from his religious background and which he sought to integrate with charismatic revivalism. A pattern of ministry which his Itinerant Preachers were unable to achieve until the Forward Movement of the 1880s in the inner cities enabled some of them to pursue the same kind of extended, localized ministry that the parish priest could exercise.

T.W.Peile, who was the Vicar of St.Luke's, Cannock from 1873-1881 was one clergyman who sought to create this kind of parish. His work was summarised on the illuminated address he was presented with on his departure for the living at Buckhurst Hill in 1880: "The offering of frequent and helpful services in the Mother-Church, as well as holding regular services at St.Thomas's Huntington; the originating of the Bridgtown and Chadsmoor district churches, which were much needed; the establishing of bible-readings, prayer and missionary meetings, children's services, and other aids for religious instruction of all classes and ages; the great interest shown in the secular education of scholars

attending the various schools; the upholding, by work and example, of the principles of the Church of England Temperance Society; the constituting of the Parish Sick and Burial Society; parochial excursions, and wholesome recreation on weekday evenings."³⁴

The great weakness of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century Anglican church had been "a decline in the effective supervision of many parishes at a time when the population of the country was expanding rapidly."³⁵ Supervision by the resident parish priest over the religious lives of his parishioners was especially difficult in a parish like Cannock which was a large, partially wooded, upland area of some 20,000 acres with a widely scattered population grouped into several townships at some distances from the parish church. It has been said that Methodism grew in the gaps left in the parochial system.³⁶ The Anglican church on the Chase worked hard to remedy this weakness from the beginning of the nineteenth century. As early as 1819 the expanding community of nailworkers at Burntwood was provided with a church. The initiative came from J.C.Woodhouse, the dean of Lichfield cathedral, who opened a subscription for building and endowing a church to serve the Burntwood area with a donation of £100. Clergy, leading landowners, principal inhabitants of the area, and local people subscribed another £900 to which the Church Building Society added a grant of £350. Sir Robert Peel and the Marquis of Anglesey provided the land for the site, and Christ Church was consecrated in 1820 with the priest at Hammerwich acting as perpetual curate of both churches until 1852.³⁷ In the 1820s an Anglican mission was established in a cottage on the wasteland of Walsall Wood by the Vicar of St. Matthew's, Walsall. In 1825 services were being held under licence in a schoolroom at Walsall Wood. In 1836 Lord Bradford provided one-and-a-half acres of land as a site for a church which was built in 1827 as St. John's.³⁸ The growing population at Churchbridge and Great Wyrley brought about by the development of Gilpin's edgetool

works and coalmines in the locality was provided with the chapel of St.Mark's in 1845 which united with Cheslyn Hay in 1846 as a district chapelry.³⁹ Likewise the growing population on the heathland to the west of Burntwood was provided with St.Anne's Church by Robertson McClean in 1865. A congregation had been gathered prior to the opening of the church by George Poole, the vicar of Burntwood. He gathered the miners "for church services both outdoors and in a carpenter's shop loaned by the Cannock Chase C.C. He also ran Sunday Schools and evening classes for miners irrespective of creed."⁴⁰

In 1843 the "Peel Act" made the creation of new parishes cheaper and easier. The Anglican church on the Chase was quick to take advantage of the new act for: Christ Church at Burntwood was made into a separate parish out of St.Michael's parish in 1845;⁴¹ St.James's at Brownhills which was built in 1850 became a separate parish in 1854; St.Mark's at Great Wyrley became a separate parish in 1868.⁴²

The Religious Worship Act of 1855 made it possible to hold religious services in unconsecrated buildings.⁴³ Anglicans were now free to build dual purpose church-schools in the numerous mining communities springing up over the Chase. At Hednesford the Marquis of Anglesey gave five acres as a site for a church in 1863. The schoolroom was built first, then followed by St.Peter's Church in 1868. In 1870 the parish of St.Peter's was created out of the parishes of Cannock and Rugeley⁴⁴

The second Vicar of Hednesford appointed in 1874 was Charles Bullivant. Where T.W. Peile came from the privileged home of a distinguished father who had been Headmaster of Repton School, and Vicar of St.Paul's, Hamstead, a Doctor of Divinity of Cambridge, and the author of several influential books, Bullivant was a layman who - after many discouragements in early life - by the efforts of his own strong will was enabled to carry out his determination to enter the Church. It was said of him that: "He was

straightforward even almost to bluntness; he detested hypocrisy, and neither sought nor gave flattery. His faith was firm and he had no sympathy with the emotional sensational nature of much "so called religion" of the present day. He worked hard in promoting the work of the Church in the parish, and he had left his mark behind him in the various missions in the parish; in the increased clerical and lay workers, mainly through his perseverance in getting help from the Church Societies for increased clerical and lay workers; in the beautiful services and efficient choir of that church; and in many other ways."⁴⁵

Between 1836 and 1879 the Church of England made a vigorous attempt to reassert its identity as the National Church through its aggressive policies of church extension, the sub-division of parishes, and a comprehensive set of activities designed to provide a place for everyone and something for everyone to do.

3. The Wesleyan Methodist Colonization of the Chase

Wesleyan colonization of the Chase was handicapped by the fact that the region was a hinterland for circuits based on Stafford, Walsall and Wolverhampton. The area of the Chase adjacent to Wolverhampton was too sparsely populated to mission effectively. Featherstone had only thirty-four inhabitants in 1851.⁴⁶ Local preachers at Wolverhampton tried briefly and unsuccessfully to establish a cause at Shareshill.⁴⁷ Laymen were more successful at Chasetown where meetings were being held in the Club Room of the Queen's Hotel from 1860 onwards until land for a chapel at the bottom of the High Street was purchased from the Marquis of Anglesey in November 1863.⁴⁸ Ministers from the Walsall First Circuit conducted 7 out of 26 Sunday appointments on the February quarter of the circuit plan for 1868, and met the Society once a fortnight, otherwise the oversight and spiritual nourishment of the Society were in the hands of the local preachers and the local

people. A chapel at Wimblebury, on the Stafford Circuit, was built in 1870. Samuel Taylor, a native of Bloxwich and baker by trade, joined the Society in 1872. For forty years he served the Society faithfully as society steward, class-leader, and superintendent of the Sunday school. It was said of him: "As the oldest tradesman in the district, he was recognised as a man of unimpeachable business integrity; and what he preached he faithfully endeavoured to practice."⁴⁹ Eleven people founded the Wesleyan Society at Hednesford. The most prominent members were Thomas Arnot and his wife. Arnot was a native of Cannock Wood. He began his working career with the Cannock Chase Colliery Company. When the West Cannock Colliery Company began its mining operations at Hednesford he was appointed the under manager.⁵⁰ The manager was William Wardle, a Primitive Methodist. The manager of the neighbouring Cannock and Rugeley Colliery Company, J.T. Williamson, was a Wesleyan Methodist. William Cope, the chairman of the West Cannock C.C., and a shareholder of the Cannock and Rugeley C.C. was a Wesleyan. It is not surprising that each company donated £100 apiece towards the cost of building the Wesleyan chapel in Station Road in 1872.⁵¹ Other Wesleyan chapels built on the Chase were: 1860 Calf Heath, 1863 Bridgtown, 1869 Watling Street, and 1876 Heath Hayes.

Wesleyan Methodism was aware of the inability of circuit ministers to expand as well as to keep their circuits and the Conference of 1854 reaffirmed the need for "reviving and sustaining the Home Missionary spirit of Methodism" and gave the Chapel Department the services of a full-time secretary.⁵² In 1856 the Contingent Fund used for helping out circuits which could not afford to pay for and to house a minister was reconstituted as the Home Mission and Contingent Fund "for the support and spread of the "Gospel in Great Britain and Ireland." Priority was given to relieving debts incurred on existing chapels, to building new chapels in areas where Methodist had migrated in large numbers, and in

supporting and reinforcing those mainly rural areas in need of more ministers.⁵³ In 1858 it was found necessary to appoint seven men as Home Missionaries to work in areas of established circuits where the work was in decline. In 1869 there were 71 Home Missionaries. In 1874 the Macclesfield District, of which the Stafford Circuit was part, took the lead in appointing Edward Smith as the first District Missionary. He conducted a mission at Hednesford in the last week of March 1879 when the guarded judgment of the Cannock Advertiser was "no doubt the visit and earnest labours of Mr. Smith will result in much good."⁵⁴

One measure adopted by Wesleyan Methodism to bridge the gulf between town and countryside was the stationing of ministers in outlying minor towns and major villages. In 1868 one of the five ministers on the Wesleyan Walsall First Circuit was stationed at Brownhills, and another in the Wesleyan stronghold of Pelsall where the pulpit was occupied twice every Sunday by a minister, and where a minister met the Society once every week on a week night.⁵⁵ One of the three Stafford ministers was stationed in Cannock from the 1870s. In 1877 a fourth, probationer, minister was stationed at Chase Town to work among the mining communities around Hednesford and Chase Town. His name was J.W. Wilshaw and he came fresh from two years training at Didsbury College, Manchester. It seems that suitable accommodation was hard to find for in his two years in the district he was shunted from Chase Town to Chase Terrace to Hednesford and back to Chase Terrace. Wilshaw was described as a "Christian minister of more than average ability and learning." His sermons were considered to be "admirable compositions combined with an agreeable and attractive manner in delivery." He was not, however, a Methodist at heart for he had been born and bred an Anglican and it was noted that he had not "shown any great attachment" to some of Methodism's more highly prized institutions. He, himself, found

the demands of going to his mid-week appointments in bad weather a severe drain upon his strength. When the Stafford Circuit decided in 1879 that it could not afford the services of a fourth minister and Wilshaw found himself transferred to Banbury he resigned from the Wesleyan ministry and entered the theological college at Lichfield to be trained for the Anglican ministry.⁵⁶ He obviously felt a call to a sustained, concentrated ministry among the mining communities of the Chase for in 1892 he was the Curate of St. John's (a mission church) at Chase Terrace.⁵⁷

Wilshaw's case illustrates the growing dissatisfaction felt within the ranks of the Wesleyan ministry with the traditional itinerant system whereby a minister's stay was limited to three years within a circuit. The role of the early Methodist preachers had been determined by their lack of education, their calling to be pioneer evangelists, and by Wesley's conviction that men of genuine ability should pursue their vocation on a national stage rather than allow themselves to be shut away in obscure parishes. An increasingly better educated ministry, a growing aversion to the rowdy revivalism associated with the ardent hell-fire preaching of the early preachers, and the opportunities to draw and to hold bigger congregations in the urban churches led an increasing number of ministers to hanker for the more protracted and concentrated kind of ministry exercised by Anglican and Nonconformist ministers. A significant role reversal had taken place during the course of the first half of the nineteenth century between Anglican clergyman and Methodist Preacher for, in 1813, a parish priest had complained of his sense of isolation when faced by the carefully structured interdependence of the Methodists fostered by their circuit system. The Methodists had "an artful and well-linked chain of dependence" which enabled every man to be "either an office bearer, or under the immediate superintendence of some person of his own rank and near his own size of understanding." The parish clergyman, acting as the

sole legally instituted guide of his flock, stood single "against a host of bands, classes, and nameless authorities all acting with the compact and uniform force provided by combination."⁵⁸ In 1863 one Methodist Preacher expressed his dissatisfaction with the traditional circuit system in these terms: "What satisfaction can a pastor find in his work when he cannot meet the same congregation more than once a month, or only once in six weeks, or perhaps, more seldom than that at times? What fruit can be expected in pastorate where the flock is scattered over a space which a minister must fail to command, whatever ingenuity or plan or measure of diligence he may attempt? What can such pastors know of their people? And, even were he to know them, what opportunity would he have of adapting and properly regulating their ministrations?"⁵⁹

4. The Revival of the Primitive Methodist Colonization of the Chase

Despite the pioneer missionary activity of the early years of the nineteenth century by Primitive Methodism around Cannock Wood and Cheslyn Hay, the movement seems to have died out in the region by 1836. In that year the Birmingham and Darlaston circuits launched a joint venture to re-establish Primitive Methodism on the Chase through a mission based in Lichfield. Primitive Methodism's aggressive policy of church expansion was pursued through a policy of multiplying circuits by what H.B.Kendall termed "budding" and "offshoots".⁶⁰ He was referring to the twofold method of circuit propagation known as "branch circuits" and "circuit missions". This was done to avoid the Wesleyan problem of creating rural circuits incapable of supporting themselves. A circuit mission was that part of a circuit which employed the full time labours of a travelling preacher supported by the circuit. His name and stations appeared on the circuit plan under the title Circuit-Mission. The preacher was subordinate to his home circuit. Since a circuit-mission was analogous to a circuit, it was the preacher's task to establish the structure of a viable

circuit as soon as was possible with a minimum of eight to ten distinct preaching places which he was supplying, and which were prepared to receive any other preachers supplied by the home circuit. When a circuit-mission had its own distinct preachers' plan, circuit quarterly accounts, and religious meetings, it became a "branch" and was one step away from achieving financial independence and circuit autonomy.⁶¹ These tidy distinctions were introduced in 1843 to clear up the confusion caused by hybrids like the Lichfield circuit which was dependent upon two mother circuits like a circuit-mission, but operated like a branch circuit because it lay in the no-man's land between the two circuits!

Sampson Turner made the first attempt to establish a Primitive Methodist presence in Lichfield in 1820 in a blacksmith's penthouse in the city.⁶² Houses continued to be registered for worship in 1822, 1823, 1826, 1827, and, most promising of all, in 1831 when a schoolroom was opened.⁶³ Lichfield, however, refused stubbornly to be taken by the Primitive Methodists.

Richard Ward, and his colleague Thomas Tompkinson, began their determined effort to establish Primitive Methodism in the city and district of Lichfield in October 1836. It was the worst part of the year to begin for "snow covered the ground." They preached, recorded Richard Ward, "from three to six times on the sabbath, and five times on the week nights. During the winter, in the streets and lanes, we preached by gaslights, lanterns, and moonlight, and were exposed to the uncivilized rabble, to cold, rain, frost and snow, while the greater part of our congregations were comfortable in their own houses, looking out of their doors, or through their windows; and those who stood near to us were shivering with cold... The Rev. Mr. Barnes, a Baptist, said, 'You labour like horses, and at night we turn out like asses.' He recommended some of his people to assist us; and cheerfully and successfully they responded." Because of having to live and work in

the hostile environment of a cathedral city Ward and Tompkinson were exploited by the people with whom they did business for they had to pay half-a-crown a week rent for their lodgings besides having to find their own "coals, candles and board"; and they had to pay an annual rent of £5 for the use of a delapidated old malthouse in a back street. It also cost over £5 of their meagre funds to repair the room, and to refit it for worship.⁶⁴

When Richard Ward and Thomas Tompkinson began their mission they claimed there was not a single Primitive Methodist in the district. Such a claim overlooks survivors of the previous missionary activities in the area like Henry Sanders of Seacroft who was converted at a camp-meeting held at Cannock Wood by Hugh Bourne on July 31, 1810, and whose "house [was] for many years open for the gospel and the servants of Christ."⁶⁵ Help was provided by local preachers from the Birmingham and Darlaston circuits who had to travel between sixteen to twenty miles to Lichfield in order to take part in missioning the streets during the week-nights, and to conduct the preaching services in the malt-house on a Sunday. A year later the united committees of the two circuits responsible for financing the mission reported that: "there are twenty places where the missionaries preach including this city; and in several others they have preached occasionally and visited several other places, and given tracts to those who are destitute of the gospel. There are ten villages where classes have been formed, and a prospect of farther good appears. In this city a society has been raised, and their lives evince the change effected. The number of members admitted into church fellowship on this station is 120; and we beg leave to inform that a society has been formed for the distribution of religious tracts among the inhabitants of this city and those of adjacent villages; these little messengers of peace have been distributed with apparent success."⁶⁶

The distances covered by the two men were considerable as they followed the lines of the better roads to the east and south-east of Lichfield. They reached out to Tamworth seven miles away to the south-east of Lichfield, and a further two miles beyond Tamworth to Polesworth. They went south to Walsall; and to places like Stonall, Rushall, and Bentley on the outskirts of Walsall. They followed the Watling Street eastwards to Fazeley, Wilnecote, and even as far as Atherstone; and westwards to Mount Pleasant, Brownhills and Norton. On their doorstep they searched out the scattered nailworkers of Burntwood. To save money on lodgings they returned home to Lichfield from wherever they were which involved journeys on foot of up to thirty miles a day! They were dealing, in the main, with handfuls of people: at Atherstone there were five only; at Mount Pleasant (Hammerwich) and Hills, 7; at Wall, 8; at Fazeley, 11; at Norton, 14; at Brownhills, 18; and at Warton, 19. There were 47 apiece at Lichfield and Burntwood.⁶⁷

The infant mission nearly died in its cot. Much of the strength of the classes meeting in the Brownhills area was derived from the ironworks opened at Pelsall in 1827 and the coalpits on the triangle of heathland between Pelsall, Norton and Brownhills. The ironworks closed temporarily in 1837: "We sustained a great loss of members for, by the stopping of the factory, many persons had to leave that part of the country, and seek work elsewhere." Another year of energetic missioning enabled the losses to be made good so that the March Quarterly Meeting of 1838 reported 150 members. It was at this meeting that the indefatigable labours of the preceding sixteen months were crowned with permission to form the small, scattered classes into the independent Primitive Methodist Lichfield Circuit.⁶⁸

The clue as to why the mission finally succeeded where the previous attempts had failed is provided by Roger Leese who says that Darlaston became the base from which

Primitive Methodism missioned the industrial region of the Black Country because of "the need to trim the widening boundaries of the Tunstall circuit."⁶⁹ The Cannock Chase area, until its own major industrial development in the second half of the nineteenth century, was a rural hinterland to the industrial areas of the Potteries in North Staffordshire, and the Black Country coalfield of South Staffordshire with their own internal, developed road and canal systems. The mission to form an independent Primitive Methodist circuit in the area was the first attempt to treat the area as a distinct district in its own right.⁷⁰ The presence of resident ministers in the district also provided the help and encouragement needed to produce the local leadership without which any branch of Methodism could not flourish. At Penkridge in October 1811 Hugh Bourne had noted that "it would be difficult to raise a work here though it might be done." In March 1813 he was more optimistic, commenting that "The people are going on well and can hold meetings themselves. I think John Cheadle will be a preacher."⁷¹ Ward and Tompkinson were in the position of being able to encourage and to develop this kind of emerging local leadership for the work in the circuit began to progress when "the Lord... raised up several friends in the city and in the country, and they put their shoulders to the work.."

One sign of the developing lay leadership was the first chapel to be built at Clayhanger in 1838 where the enclosure of Ogley Hay adjacent to the coalmines of the local landowner, Phineas Fowkes Hussey, at the tiny village of Brownhills, became available for redevelopment as farming land and building plots to house the workers needed in the ironworks at Pelsall and the neighbouring coalmines.⁷² Other chapels were built in well established industrial villages as Bloxwich in 1842,⁷³ Cheslyn Hay in 1845, and Burntwood in 1849.

The development of Primitive Methodist circuits involved passing from an "heroic age of missionary expansion" to one of "revivalism and consolidation."⁷⁴ The second phase involved establishing stable societies in permanent places of worship. The beginning of this second phase can be dated from the erection of the circuit chapel in Lichfield in 1848 due to the initiative of John Henshaw who removed from Manchester to Lichfield in 1845 and "exerted his influence in favour of the people's wishes, by collecting money, securing a building-site, and otherwise helping to raise a house for the honour of his God."⁷⁵

The growing stability of the circuit was nearly undermined in 1851 by a series of scandals at Bloxwich, Lichfield and Cheslyn Hay involving unpaid debts, misappropriated society funds, and sexual abuse. The membership of Cheslyn Hay slumped from 21 in 1845 to 7 in 1859, and that of Lichfield from 20 in 1848 to 5 in 1859. The Circuit lost 50 members and expelled another 6 in 1851.⁷⁶ The constant threat to the stability of the Circuit was the fluctuations in trade and the consequent removals of members in search of work. It was reported in 1839 that "Although we had many removals, yet we filled up our ranks and had an increase of two members for the year ending March, 1839."⁷⁷ On the other hand an increase in trade could be beneficial. In 1851, the year of the scandals, there were 250 members distributed among six chapels and eleven other preaching places around the boundaries of the future coalfield. The preaching places were in well established mining areas: Brownhills, Littleworth, Pelsall and Cannock Wood. This meant that the Lichfield Circuit had a firm, strategically placed base from which to exploit the evangelistic opportunities about to be provided by the industrial development of the eastern half of the Chase. Littleworth had a chapel by 1852, Pelsall by 1853, Brownhills by 1856, and Cannock Wood by 1858. Membership was small - Burntwood 9, Littleworth and Pelsall 10 apiece, and Cannock Wood (as befitted the long association of the area with Primitive

Methodism) had 20 members. Adherents (or "hearers" as they were called) usually outnumbered the members by two or three to one. In 1859 Burntwood was attracting 50 people to worship, Littleworth 30, Pelsall and Cannock Wood 80 apiece. Brownhills was the biggest Society on the circuit. It had 50 members in 1856, and 109 in 1859 when 300 people turned up to worship in a chapel built to hold 350. The circuit doubled its membership between 1851 and 1860. In the latter year there were 510 members, 12 chapels, and 8 preaching places. This improvement was due to "the opening up of new collieries within its borders which brought an influx of inhabitants, and among them some active and useful members of the Primitive Methodist societies."⁷⁸ These newcomers not only strengthened the leadership of the local societies but also, in the best traditions of the Methodist Diaspora, established new societies in the villages where they settled. George Stubbs, a native of Hammerwich, on returning to his native heath in 1850 from West Bromwich where he had been converted "among the Wesleyans of Hill Top" played a leading role in founding the society at Mount Pleasant in 1868.⁷⁹ William Pritchard of Chasetown, Thomas Pritchard of Shropshire, and Joseph Vernon of Willenhall were three miners who settled in Heath Hayes. At first they were content to walk down the hill to worship at Littleworth. After six months they hired a room in the Five Ways Inn at Heath Hayes for holding regular services thus setting in motion the train of events which led to the building of the P.M. chapel in 1872.⁸⁰ The iron industry of East Shropshire underwent a process of gradual decline during the nineteenth century with the result that from the 1840s onwards there had been a process of gradual migration from East Shropshire to South Wales, Cleveland, and Scotland: "Miners were attracted to the new deep mines opened up in the late 19th century on the edges of the South Staffordshire coalfield,

particularly in the Cannock area."⁸¹ Some of these miners settled at Chadsmoor where they built a chapel in 1876.⁸²

A mixture of preacher inspired revivals and cottage based praying revivalism played its part in the consolidation and expansion of the circuit. A society was formed at Pelsall in 1845 as the result of a revival sparked off by a preacher called Adams at a cottage meeting held in the village.⁸³ Revivalism broke out at a tea-meeting held at Bentley Hay in July 1847 in order to raise funds for a Sunday school when "a cry for mercy was heard in different parts of the tent, the praying labourers buckled on their harness and about twenty souls were brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God." The note of formalism had already crept into Primitive Methodism because the editor of the magazine added this footnote to Graham's account of the proceedings: "We are glad to hear that the converting work is still connected with our social tea-meeting."⁸⁴ A revival broke out at Birchills at the beginning of 1848 during which 30 people were converted, 29 of whom became members on trial in the following March. John Graham, the superintendent minister, followed up the revival by dividing Birchills into five districts and by appointing five teams of people to collect money for a new chapel in each district. Evangelistic efforts were not allowed to slacken. Services were preceded by singing and preaching in the open air with the result that the services were crowded.⁸⁵ In 1854 a fiery young preacher from Bloxwich called James Beddows sparked off a revival in a cottage meeting in Mill Street, Cannock which led to the formation of a society, and the building of a chapel in 1865.

The origins of the Lichfield Circuit had followed the traditional model of the early parishes and Methodist Circuits by establishing an urban base from which the surrounding countryside was missioned. The same pattern repeated itself within the circuit with the stronger urban churches missioning their neighbouring mining villages. Walsall Wood, for

example, was missioned by a team from the Mt. Zion chapel at Brownhills which held cottage meetings from 1861 onwards. Land and money for a chapel was found by 1863.⁸⁶ The chapel built at Chase Terrace in 1870 was the final product of a mission begun in June 1868 after the Circuit Quarterly-meeting had given its permission for "the brethren of Chasetown" to visit the small mining village a mile away. "After receiving this permission, they heartily began to hold outdoor services, which they continued as long as the weather was favourable. During that time the work of God began to move in the hearts of the people, and numbers flocked to hear the gospel preached. When the weather was not fit for outdoor services, we held the meetings in a house kindly lent for that occasion." In January 1869 a room was provided free of charge for the conduct of services and for the holding of a Sunday school. There were 14 members in the Society, and 60 children with 12 teachers in the Sunday school, by the end of February 1869.⁸⁷

The methods used to promote growth by the Primitive Methodists on Cannock Chase were a mixture of old and new strategies. "The first principle of Methodism" affirmed John Wesley in 1790, "was wholly and solely to preach the Gospel."⁸⁸ This is what Ward and his successors did in the beginning, and by their field preaching establishing cottage prayer-meetings around which a nucleus of committed members could gather. The next step was to consolidate the work in a permanent place of worship. This was especially important in an urban setting as was discovered as early as 1760 with the building of a chapel at Wednesbury where Wesley found that "Few congregations exceed this either in number or seriousness," and that the morning congregation exceeded that of "the congregation at the Foundery."⁸⁹ The value of an attractive, prominently sited chapel was acknowledged by the Primitive Methodists when they built the Bethel Chapel in Sheffield in 1834: "The erection of Bethel Chapel, though it involved a heavy financial burden for

some years, gave our people a standing and a place for ingathering which they would not otherwise have had."⁹⁰ In 1880 Thomas Champness attributed the lack of progress made by Wesleyan Methodism in Sunderland to the lack of chapel-building "while the population has been going into the suburbs to live, and there being no chapels - at least very poor chapel accommodation - we have lost hundreds of members."⁹¹ Established, successful societies, in their turn became centres for missioning their neighbourhoods. Kirkgate Chapel, the mother chapel of Wesleyan Methodism in Bradford, became the mother society of chapels built at Great Horton in 1814, and at Dudley Hill, Bradford Moor, and Eastbrook in 1823. The Sunday School movement gave another option to the cottage prayer-meeting for planting a society in a new neighbourhood or village. This strategy was used extensively in Bradford where it was used to plant churches at Manningham in 1818, and at Cheapside and White Abbey in 1824.⁹² Then there was the unpremeditated founding of societies by migrant Methodists planting their faith wherever they happened to find themselves.

5. The New Connexion Colonization of the Chase

The New Connexion society at Cheslyn Hay embarked on a policy of planting new societies and building new chapels on Cannock Chase from 1855 onwards. It began with the decision to form a new trust in 1851. The new trust put in motion plans to build a new chapel. Land next to the chapel was bought in January 1853. The building committee did not meet until February 1854, and the chapel was not built until July 1855. The delays could have been caused by difficulties in getting planning permission to build the front of the chapel so close to the main road; and by the need to dress by hand the 40,000 used bricks bought in May 1854.¹ Two of the trustees who retired in 1851 - Job Whitehouse and John Lawson - lived at Wedges Mills. Job Whitehouse was the son of Samuel Whitehouse,

one of the founder members of the original Society. Meetings for prayer and preaching were held in Job's cottage, and that of John Lawson all the time they lived in Wedges Mills from the 1820s onwards.⁹⁴ The efforts of Job Whitehouse and John Lawson bore fruit in 1845 when a building adjoining Job Whitehouse's cottage which had served variously as a dwelling house, a workplace for the factory, and as a brewhouse, was converted into a chapel. One of the trustees was John Lawson's son and namesake. The society struggled along until 1872. Its closure was probably due to the founding of the New Connexion chapel at Bridgtown in 1864 which attracted the support of the Whitehouse family away from Wedges Mills.⁹⁵

The villages of Wedges Mills and Churchbridge grew up around the edgetool factories. In order to attract the skilled workers he needed William Gilpin had to provide cottages for them. Bridgtown, on the other hand, was deliberately planned. The Wolverhampton Building Society bought thirty acres of neglected farming land at Leacroft in 1861 and laid it out on a grid system.⁹⁶ Plots were sold as sites for houses and factories. One of the first arrivals in the village was John Perry who began to hold class-meetings as soon as he arrived in the new location. He was supported by George Buxton and William Whitehouse who were also among the first workers at Gilpins to settle at Bridgtown. Alderman James Walker, the manager of the Wolverhampton Building Society, and himself a Methodist, donated some of the land to be used as a site for a new chapel. A schoolroom was the first building to be erected.⁹⁷ Sadly, John Perry had died in 1862 but the Whitehouse family moved to Bridgtown in 1863 and provided the drive needed to get the chapel built.

Miners took over from edgetool workers in promoting the growth of the New Connexion on the Chase. The Society that built the chapel at Heath Hayes in 1876 owed its origin to two miners by the names of Pritchard and Vernon. The Society at Chase Terrace

was begun by two other miners - Bough and Hopley- who were supported in holding cottage meetings by people from Cheslyn Hay until there was a local Society strong enough to hold its own, unaided meetings.⁹⁸ The miners needed the support of the wealthy business men and industrialists at Cheslyn Hay. William Crutchley, with tileries in Cheslyn Hay and Wolverhampton, was involved with the Whitehouse family in the erection of the New Connexion chapel at High Town in October 1879 which replaced the school-chapel built seven years earlier. The prime mover behind the scene was Job Whitehouse, a brother of Cornelius Whitehouse, for at the stone laying ceremony it was said that the scheme would not have been able to start as soon as it did without his help.⁹⁹ Albert Hawkins, the coalmaster and "Squire" of Cheslyn Hay, joined forces with William Crutchley to build the chapel at Chase Terrace in October 1880.¹⁰⁰ This working combination between witness and wealth goes right back to the origins of the Evangelical Revival on the Chase in 1776, and the origins of the Methodist Revival on the Chase in 1803, for behind the itinerating ministry of Jonathan Scott was the patronage of Williellma, Lady Glenorchy,¹⁰¹ and behind the itinerant cottage-meeting ministry of Thomas Gething was the patronage of Elizabeth Birch.

5. Conclusion

The Anglican and Methodist colonization of the Chase followed a basic pattern of growth going back to the very origins of Christianity itself - that of a "mother" church with dependent outlying ones. The Anglican diocese and parish evolved from this basic pattern with cathedrals and minsters being the mother churches. The New Connexion Methodists used this basic pattern of growth with Salem chapel at Cheslyn Hay becoming the mother church to those at Wedges Mills, Bridgetown, Heath Hayes, Chase Terrace and High Town. The Anglicans did not revert to this pattern of the parish church being mother

church to outlying churches served by curates in the more populous parts of the parish until they had tried the sub-division of large parishes into smaller ones and found it unsatisfactory because it simply multiplied the administration involved. The principle of promoting growth by sub-division was the traditional device of Methodist circuit system. It worked better for the Primitive Methodists than for the Wesleyans because the former gave priority to marginal regions like the Chase whilst the latter used sub-division as a device for creating privileged urban circuits and neglecting rural ones. Consequently, Primitive Methodism passed from the colonization stage to the consolidation stage quicker than the Wesleyans on the Chase. Their process of consolidation began about 1848 whereas the Wesleyans did not start regarding the Chase as an independent region until 1880.

The Anglican parish system was more efficient than the Methodist circuit system because it provided its priests with the opportunity to pursue a more extended and concentrated ministry than that possible to the Itinerant Methodist preacher changing circuits every two or three years. The conscientious parish priest with his team of curates could follow Wesley's concept of an evangelical pastorate promoting steady, assured growth without falling between the two options. The defection of J.W. Wilshaw was a sign of the Wesleyan ministry's growing dissatisfaction with the itinerant circuit system. This dissatisfaction was expressed more by the people who did not enter the ministry than by those like Wilshaw who left it, for in 1870 *The Guardian* claimed that no less than eight hundred sons of Wesleyan ministers had received Holy Orders in the Church of England.¹⁰² This claim was given some credence by Charles H. Kelly's remembering that no less than three of the tutors during his stay at Didsbury College between 1855 and 1858 had sons in the Anglican ministry.¹⁰³

Endnotes

- 1.P.Welsby, *How The Church of England Works* (1960), 18-23
2. *ibid.*,
- 3.G.C.Probert, *The Sociology of Cornish Methodism* (1971), 7-10
- 4.W.Pilkington, *Flashes of Preston Methodism* (1916), 14
- 5.D.A.Gowland, *Methodist secession: The Origins of Free Methodism in Three Lancashire Towns* (1979), 26
- 6.Probert, *The Sociology of Cornish Methodism*, 20
- 7.The figures were: Anglican - 5,292,551; Nonconformist- 5,604,115; Wesleyans- 1,554,528. In 1849 the membership of the Wesleyan Connexion was 348, 274 which was 1.4% of the population. [Davies, George & Rupp. *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* Volume 2 (1983), 122
- 8.*Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1863, 73
- 9.W.B.Fitzgerald, *The Roots of Methodism* (1903), 43 The reference is to Edwin H.Tindall's *The Wesleyan-Methodist Atlas of England and Wales* (1878) The reviewer of this atlas [in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1878, 56-58] exposed the hollowness of claims for a comprehensive coverage by Methodism of England and Wales made by people like Fitzgerald in his careful survey of the individual maps. He pointed out that anyone travelling by train from Essex to London "would be able to count, as he passed, thirty-five villages on the right and forty on the left, before he got to Stratford-le-Bow, all without the shadow of a Wesleyan-Methodist chapel or preaching-room in them." Essex itself "was almost a sheet of white paper, for anything Wesleyan-Methodism has done to colour it." Most of Surrey looked like No Man's Land. Even in a Wesleyan stronghold like Norfolk, "The sparseness of places and people at the northern end betwixt Lynn and Dereham and the coast, presents obvious difficulties to a system of universal extension.."
- 10.I am indebted to Dr.Roger Leese for this definition.
- 11.R.Chew, *James Everett: A Biography* (1876), 82-83
- 12.F.J.Jobson, *A Plea for the Support of Methodism in the Villages* (1873), 13. In 1842 the Great Horton Circuit was formed out of one of the Bradford urban circuits with five Societies, two ministers, and 1000 members; but it was too poor to raise the quarterage needed for the support of its ministers and had to rely on financial contributions from "the gentry of other denominations"! [J.W.Bradley. *Girlington Wesleyan Church Jubilee 1870-1920* (1920), 41-42]
- 13.J.Bush, editor, *W.O.Simpson, Methodist minister and Missionary* (1886), 430
14. *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1834, 165
- 15.A.G.Pointon, *Methodists in West Somerset: The Story of the West Somerset Circuit 1790-1980* (1982)
16. *ibid*
- 17.Jobson, *A Plea for the Support of Methodism in the Villages*, 29
- 18.D.Clarke, *The Other Eden* (1985), 67
- 19.K.S.Inglis, *Churches and the Working Class in Victorian England* (1963), 27
20. *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 67-68
- 21.G.Kitson Clark, *Churchmen and the Condition of England 1832-1885* (1973), xviii
22. *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Volume II, 73. The non-residence of clergymen in their parishes was due to a number of causes. One was the lack of a suitable parsonage. Both the Vicar of Norton Canes (Rev'd Joseph Barber) and his curate (Rev'd W.B.Collis) chose to live in Cannock for there was no vicarage at Norton Canes. In 1833 there were 2,878 parishes without a parsonage. And of those parishes which did provide accommodation some 1,728 were officially described as "unfit". (Peter Virgin, *The Church In An Age of Negligence* [1989], 195) In the case of Barber and Collis non-residence did not affect the performance of their clerical duties. Poverty forced some clergymen to hold two livings. John Wesley's father held the two livings of Epworth and Wroote in Lincolnshire. Aristocratic holders of livings corrupted the system of plural holdings and the problem of the non-residence of clergymen by giving widely separated livings as sinecures to people they wished to patronise.
- 23.S.C.Carpenter, *Church and People 1789-1889* (1973), p.xviii
- 24.J.T.Gould, *Men of Aldridge* (1957), 85-86
25. *ibid.*, 85
26. *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1864 , 945
- 27.O.Chadwick, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement* (1992), 18-19, 47.
- 28.K.Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England 1734-1984* (1988), 27
- 29.D.Bowen, *The Idea of the Victorian Church: a study of the Church of England 1833-1889* (McGill, 1968), viii

30. Roland Bainton [in *Pilgrim Parson: The Life of James Herbert Bainton* (1958), 4] lists the disabilities of his Congregational forebears: "at birth denied registration; at death burial in consecrated ground; and in life matriculation at the universities and eligibility for government posts. The lack of university degrees excluded them from medicine and hampered them in law." These disabilities were gradually removed during the nineteenth century. The Test and Corporation Acts were repealed in 1828; restrictions on registrations of births, marriages and deaths removed in 1836, on burials in 1880, and marriages in 1898; restrictions on entrance to Oxford and Cambridge in 1854 and 1856. Restrictions on holding public office in 1866. [Alan Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England* (1976), 163]
31. G.F.A. Best, *Temporal Pillars* (1964), 137ff.
32. G.M. Young, *Victorian England* (1973), 21
33. Best, *Temporal Pillars*, 155
34. *Cannock Advertiser*, 02/10/1880
35. D.W. Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People 1780-1830* (1988), 12
36. Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, 109
37. *Victoria County History*, Volume XIV (1990), 220
38. *Victoria County History*, Volume VI, 281
39. *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 80 District chapels have been described as "inconvenient and irritating devices to supply the deficiency of church accommodation" which did not really meet the needs of the poor they were intended to serve for when "a chapel-of-ease or a parochial church was built to take the pressure off a parish church - the mother church, as it would then be known - the directly remunerative church services, baptisms and burials and weddings, would probably have to be performed in the mother church; and provision would be made to ensure that the incumbent did not lose his fees or their equivalent. He would probably take the greater part, perhaps even the whole, of the Easter offerings." (Best, *Temporal Pillars*, 195-197) The Church of England addressed itself to this problem of finance associated with the provision of new churches as early as 1703 when Queen Anne directed that tithes paid to the crown by the Church (known as Queen Anne's Bounty) should be redirected towards the use of the Church. In 1836 the Ecclesiastical Commission was formed with the purpose of paying bishops and others fixed salaries so that a central fund could be created out of which new parishes could be endowed and the income of poor benefices augmented. (Cecil and Clayton, *Our National Church* [1913], 201 & 204) Compulsory church rates were abolished in 1868.
40. M.E. Mills, "Women, Family and Community on the Cannock Chase Coalfield" (Wolverhampton Polytechnic M.A. thesis 1987), 33
41. *Victoria County History*, Volume XIV, 220
42. *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 81
43. A. Armstrong, *The Church of England, The Methodists, and Society 1700-1850* (1973), 158
44. *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 64
45. *Cannock Advertiser* 23/10/1887
46. White's Directory for Staffordshire 1851, 154
47. A.C. Pratt, *Methodism in the Black Country*, 83
48. *Chasetown Trinity Methodist Church Handbook* 1964
49. *Cannock Advertiser* February/ 1912
50. *Cannock Advertiser* 24/06/1893
51. *Cannock Advertiser* 23/09/1922
52. Davies, George & Rupp, *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Volume 2 (1978), 124
53. *ibid.*, 128
54. *Cannock Advertiser* 09/03/1879
55. This attention due to the fact that the owners of the Pelsall Coal and Iron Company were Wesleyan Methodists - Joaz Bloomer Senior and Junior. Joaz Bloomer senior filled many offices at church and circuit level. His son was equally loyal and zealous. They provided most of the money for building and maintaining the chapel. They were broad-minded men who; "by gifts of money and by self-sacrificial labours did much for Nonconformity in [the] parish and neighbourhood." [information from exhibition in Walsall Local History Archives]
56. *Cannock Advertiser*, 06/09/1879
57. A. Williams, *Sketches in and around Lichfield and Rugeley* (1892), 95
58. Davies, George & Rupp, *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Volume 1, 312
59. *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* 1863, 179-180
60. H.B. Kendall, *History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (1919), 47-48
61. J. Flesher, *The General Consolidated Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (1849), 128
62. J. Petty, *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (1880), 81

63. *Victoria County History*, Volume XIV, 148
64. An account of the formation of the circuit was provided by Richard Ward in *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, 1848, 422-423
65. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1847, 699
66. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1848, 422-423
67. Information on the individual classes and their membership found in the Lichfield P.M. Circuit Account Book (*Brownhills* 398/18 Walsall Local History Archives)
68. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1848, 423
69. RLeese. "The Impact of Methodism on Black Country Society" (Manchester University Ph.D thesis 1972), 233.
70. The situation was similar to that which existed in the ten miles between the Wesleyan circuits centred on Macclesfield and Chester in 1803. The societies in this area "were situated at the extreme ends" of the two circuits so that supplying them with ministerial oversight was very difficult with "the most slender prospect of the intermediate space ever receiving adequate religious cultivation." The problem was solved by creating a new circuit based on Congleton. George Smith. *History of Wesleyan Methodism, Volume 2*. (1865), 392
71. *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 135
72. White's *Directory of Staffordshire* 1851, 574
73. The chapel cost £284 to build of which the 24 members could raise only £19. The precarious financial character of most Methodist chapel building can be seen from the experience of John Lawley who became the superintendent minister of the Lichfield circuit in 1849. When he paid a visit to a man who held a £60 mortgage on the Bloxwich chapel to ask for a little more time in which to pay off the debt because the man "would have his money that he would wait no longer" the man replied that he would not grant their request unless Lawley, and his companion James Baker, "would pledge themselves to see him paid, as the trustees who were on the note were worth nothing." *Brownhills* 318/17 Walsall Local History Archives
74. The phrases are taken from James Obelkevich, *Religion and Society: South Lindsey 1825-1875* (1976), 220
75. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1848, 181
76. *Brownhills* 318/17 (Circuit schedule for 1851)
77. *Brownhills* 318/17 (Circuit schedule for 1839)
78. Petty, *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, 493
79. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1855, 443
80. *Cannock Advertiser* May/1925
81. B. Trinder, *The Industrial Revolution in Shropshire* (1981), 240-241
82. Chadsmoor Primitive Methodist Church Jubilee Handbook 1925
83. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1845, 526
84. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1847, 560
85. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1848, 709
86. Walsall Wood (Ebenezer) Methodist Church Diamond Jubilee Souvenir Booklet.
87. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1869, 307
88. Sermon 121, "Prophets and Priests." A.C.Outler, editor, *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 4 (Abingdon, 1987), 80
89. Thomas Jackson, editor, *Works of John Wesley*, Volume II (1865), 499
90. W.J.Robson, *Silsden Primitive Methodism* (1910), 225
91. E.M.Champness, *The Life Story of Thomas Champness* (1907), 202
92. J.W.Bradley, *Girlington Wesleyan Church Jubilee: 1870-1920* (1920), 32-35
93. Documents (minutes, letters, plans and receipts) in Salem Trust Wallet in Cannock Circuit Safe
94. A.C.Pratt, "Bits of the Old Black Country: Cutting Roads to Fortune with Edge Tools." Part V. At Wedge's Mills. *Midland County Express* (20/10/1883), 135-137
95. 1872 is the date given by Greenslade in *Victoria County History*, Volume V, 68. Joseph Horton, born in 1847, reckoned he attended the chapel until he was 27 years of age which would give a date of 1874 (*Cannock Advertiser* 10/7/1926). Although Horton's memory could be at fault, his date is to be preferred to that of Greenslade who appears to have supplemented his documentary research on Cannock with quick visits in which he relied over heavily, and too credulously, on faulty local oral information.
96. A.C.Pratt (Part IV, 142-143) gives the date for the purchase of the land as 1863, but the Medical Officer of Health in his report to the Cannock Local Board in January 2nd, 1885 stated that two rows of houses adjacent to Churchbridge had "all been erected since 1861, when Bridgtown was laid out for building purposes by the Wolverhampton Building Society." *Minutes of Cannock Local Board* Volume 2 for

1882-1885

97. Pratt, Part VI. "From Wedges Mills To Bridgtown", 142

98. R. Ridgway, "A History of Cheslyn Hay" (private mss. 1951)

99. *Cannock Advertiser* 25/10/1879

100. *Cannock Advertiser* 30/10/1880

101. A. G. Matthews, *The Congregational Churches of Staffordshire* (1924), 134-135

102. F. Hockin, *John Wesley and Modern Methodism* (1887), 132

103. C. H. Kelly, *Memories* (1910), 6

Chapter Seven

THE CONSOLIDATION OF METHODISM ON CANNOCK CHASE

1880-1893

I. Introduction

Between 1877 and 1881 the three major Methodist bodies established on the Chase consolidated their presence within the region. The Primitive Methodist Bloxwich and Cannock Circuit was formed out of eleven chapels and 368 members of the Lichfield Circuit to consolidate Primitive Methodism's hold on the south of the Chase, leaving the parent circuit with ten chapels and 392 members to consolidate its hold on the northern part of the Chase. In 1880 the Wesleyan Cannock Chase Circuit was formed out of the Stafford Circuit. In 1881 the Methodist New Connexion Cannock Chase Circuit was formed with Salem, Cheslyn Hay, being the circuit church. With new circuits being formed and new ministers arriving anxious to make a good impression, the years between 1880 and 1893 were years of revival for the Methodists on Cannock Chase.

The excitement of revival matched the mood of the inhabitants of the Chase for it was a turbulent time with a constant movement of people in search of work into and out of the district. This turbulent character of the 1880s is reflected in the Wesleyan Cannock Circuit's figures for members received from and transferred to other circuits:

Year	Received	Removed	Loss
1880	56	67	11
1881	21	24	3
1882	20	49	29
1883	21	60	39

1884	28	101	73
1885	12	66	54
1886	7	40	33
1887	7	28	21
1888	11	46	35

The more adventurous were emigrating abroad. In 1876 Queen Victoria was proclaimed the Empress of India. At one stroke 300 million people were added to the British Empire. In the next twenty-five years 5 million square miles were added to the bounds of the empire so that by 1900 Queen Victoria ruled over an empire consisting of 13 million square miles inhabited by 370 million people.¹ The empire was already regarded as a solution to the nation's social and industrial problems by providing an outlet for surplus labour. During the rather bitter coal strike of 1879 J. Southall, the Miner's Agent, said that emigration was one of the best means of improving the condition of the working classes, and he hoped that each man would consider the matter, as both they who emigrated and they who were left behind would be better off.² The favourite destination throughout the century 1815-1914 however was the United States. Of the 16.4 million who emigrated from the United Kingdom no less than 11 million went to the United States and a further 2.55 million to Canada. Australia and New Zealand attracted a further 2 million and South Africa 0.85 million.³

Colour and a spirit of adventure were introduced into religion on the Chase with the advent of the Salvation Army in 1882. Colour and a sense of drama was also introduced into the worship of the Anglican Church as parish priests began to adopt in varying degrees of commitment the vestments, liturgical practices and music associated with the Tractarian revival. As a result of these changes and new arrivals there was a general revival of

religion across the Chase. To quote Albert Edward Foster of Heath Hayes:: "This was at a time of great religious activity. All the churches seemed to be alive and very much in earnest, and there used to be a Missioner engaged to come and lead a Mission in the street before Service time (several nights a week) and the people were invited to come to the various Churches to hear the Gospel preached. I remember that the Church of England used to hold Open Air Meetings at that time, and the Salvation Army was all alive all over the Cannock Chase District. I remember a number of young people besides myself were persuaded to embrace the Christian religion at this time and join the Methodist Church."⁴

The aim of this chapter is to examine this revival activity and see how the various religious bodies adopted and adapted one another's methods. The period was characterized by the dominance of stage-managed revival and the specialist itinerant revivalist - both ordained and lay. Revivals became less spontaneous and more restrained. Sankey and Moody conducted their second evangelistic campaign in the British Isles between 1881 and 1884 and it was said of Moody that he "strongly objected to manifestations of bodily excitement in his meetings, and promptly checked all such demonstrations."⁵ This seems to have been the prevailing attitude among the itinerant revivalists at this period.

2. The Wesleyan Revival

One of the three Stafford Circuit ministers had been resident in Cannock for some years prior to the sub-division of the Stafford circuit in 1880, and he was now joined by the Rev'd. E. Murphy as the second minister stationed at Hednesford. Murphy was an imaginative, enterprising and energetic minister in the best traditions of those Wesleyan ministers who took seriously their task to extend as well to keep the circuits entrusted to their care.⁶ His opening sermon revealed him to be "a most able and impressive preacher."

The prediction that "much good will be done in the town during his comparatively brief sojourn in this circuit" was amply justified by his subsequent ministry.⁷

By December 1880 he had purchased a "powerful magic lantern" which he used to give two entertaining lectures to children and adults respectively on Christmas Day.⁸ During the last week of January and the first week of February 1881 he called on the services of the District Missionary, Richard Charlesworth, to assist him in holding revivalist services complete with traditional hell-fire sermons followed up by traditional prayer-meetings to enforce the sermon's call to personal commitment: "A considerable number of persons (chiefly adults)" gave "evidence of a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins" during the first week of the mission which was conducted by Charlesworth.⁹ Under Murphy's preaching during the second week "a number... professed a desire and determination to lead a new life." Murphy spent the two weeks of the mission visiting from house-to-house in and around Hednesford. With the coming of the summer weather he was taking advantage of the large green in front of the Anglesey Hotel to preach out-of-doors to large audiences.¹⁰ The following week the defunct Tract Society was relaunched at a public tea attended by 150 people at which £8 was raised for the purchase of new tracts.¹¹ Converts from the earlier mission were present at another open-air meeting held in Station Street in the last Saturday of June testifying to their changed lives. Mr. Wilkinson, a lay District Missionary, was also present at this meeting. A large crowd marked by "good order, great attention, and hearty singing" was once again in attendance.¹² Murphy was present at the Cannock Wake held in October. On the Saturday he went around the crowds attending the Fair giving out tracts to the fair ground attendants and customers alike. Bad weather, and the inability to obtain the use of a marquee, prevented him from holding an open-air service, but he was back to hold one on the

Sunday afternoon.¹³ On Saturday November 20, he opened a mission in the front room of a cottage at the bottom of Bradbury Lane.¹⁴ More enterprise and ingenuity were exercised at Christmas when he distributed free of charge to every house in Hednesford a local almanac containing a list of services, a digest of Methodist doctrine, and a religious message.

1882 began with the re-opening of the Circuit Chapel on the Walsall Road. In response to the demand for sittings, the partition between the chapel and the schoolroom was removed, the pulpit moved back six feet, and eight new pews were added.¹⁵ The whole of what had been the schoolroom was devoted to free sittings. The re-opening of the chapel was marked with a revival. On January 22, the District Missionary, George Byron, began a fortnight of revival services in Cannock. He had worked with Moody and Sankey at Liverpool. He was described as "a fluent speaker and a most powerful preacher, and it seems almost impossible that anyone can depart from his presence unmoved. His style is so simple that a child can understand him, and yet the effect of his discourses is marvellous, and this without the extravagance of outward show, language, and gesticulations which unfortunately are associated with the services of many of our modern enthusiasts."¹⁶ The services on the first Sunday, Monday and Tuesday were preceded by "a band of Wesleyans and others" parading through different parts of the town, singing as they went, and collecting "a goodly number of persons" who accompanied them to the church. The numbers of people attending the services grew every evening until the church was almost full. The addresses were on familiar subjects like "The Prodigal Son" and "Lot's Wife". The vestry was used as an inquiry room where "those under a deep sense of sin and seeking salvation" were given guidance and spiritual comfort. One hundred and ninety persons responded to the appeals made during the fortnight the mission lasted.¹⁷ The number of conversions is reflected in the membership of the church which went from 59 members to

93 members in the course of the Quarter. The numbers had declined to 75 the following year after the manner of a revival, but a year later they had recovered to 84 - at which level they remained constant to the end of the century. The revival consolidated the work done previously, and laid the foundations of the church's life for the next generation for the membership returns indicate there was another revival in 1911 when the membership leaped from 75 to 118.

The second week of Byron's mission in Cannock coincided with a mission conducted in Hednesford by a T.R.Pickering who "is possessed with a clear and pleasant voice, is a rapid speaker, and is very apt in suiting his utterances to any circumstances." There were prayer meetings every afternoon at 1.30 p.m. and "previous to the evening service the streets have been paraded by a band of workers singing hymns and occasionally short addresses have been given by Mr.Pickering and others." The prayer-meetings and evening services were well attended. Pickering spoke on subjects like "The Old and the New Way", "The New Birth", and "The Danger of Delay". Being possessed of a good voice he also sang a sacred solo at each service. Meetings for prayer and counsel followed the services and "A large number... responded both from the regular congregation, and also some described as being the worst characters in Hednesford."¹⁸

Making allowances for the constant movement of population within the district during the decade, the statistics of church membership - which show a dramatic rise in the number of members followed by a dramatic decrease - indicate that Pickering's mission was part of a popular revival of religion sparked off by Murphy's ministry in Hednesford:

Year	Membership	Gain	Year	Membership	Loss
1881	85	+33	1885	175	-17
1882	145	+60	1886	153	-22
1883	150	+5	1887	136	-17
1884	192	+45	1888	101	-25

The Advertiser acknowledged that the mission was a success but Pickering, unlike Byron, must have been one of the modern enthusiasts for the Advertiser added the comment, "However much some may differ from the means used to arrest the fallen."¹⁹ Three weeks later Holford (the superintendent minister) and Murphy, assisted by a number of local preachers, conducted a fortnight's mission at Wimblebury where "A large number have been seriously impressed by the services and have been led to join the church." The membership increased from 28 to 44 at which figure it more or less remained constant until 1897 from which point the society went into decline. Village chapels need periodic revivals in which "successive cohorts of the young are brought to an emotional commitment to the church of their parents"²⁰ in order to consolidate the ongoing life of the church, and to inject it with new blood. Otherwise the core of families which constitute the strength of village societies gradually shrinks and the cause goes into decay.

The fourteen months between the end of January 1882 and the end of April 1883 seem to have been a time of consolidation, but revival activity was resumed with the opening of a chapel at Norton Canes for worship on Monday April 31, 1883.²¹ There were schemes to build a new chapel at Chase Terrace, and a mission room at Bradbury Lane. The first Sunday of May 1883 saw W. Shepherd Allen, the Liberal M.P. for Newcastle-under-Lyme and a champion of traditional revivalism within Methodism, preaching at the Hednesford Wesleyan Sunday school anniversary: "Until about a dozen years ago he was a member of

the Church of England, when he joined the Wesleyan body and soon found a place as a local preacher. He may truly be said not to 'hide his light under a bushel,' for as a revivalist preacher and evangelist he is most earnest and useful, sometimes even going into the streets with a singing band. It may also be mentioned that he entirely supports four lay evangelists, men who have done an immense amount of good amongst the working population."²² Here was a revival on Allen's part of that practice of hiring itinerant lay preachers by prosperous Dissenting businessmen at the beginning of the century. The following week one of Allen's lay evangelists - Daniels of Stockport - assisted by Murphy held three open-air services each day on Whit Monday and Whit Tuesday when large crowds of people were present: "Having been a collier he speaks the 'collier's language', and he possesses the advantage of being a good singer." At the closing service held in the chapel on the Tuesday night "several came forward, in response to an invitation to signify their determination to lead a better life."²³

In April 1883 Murphy also began a school-mission in the shop of a wheelwright called Norton at Old Hednesford. One of the founder members was Thomas Brown, a native of Hadley in Shropshire, who came to Old Hednesford in 1881 to work at the Valley Pit of the Cannock and Rugeley Colliery Company. About 80 children from the neighbourhood, "most of whom attended no school", were gathered into the Sunday school.²⁴ A lot of support and encouragement for the infant mission was given by W.H.Gellion, a local preacher at Hednesford. He had come to Hednesford in 1866 to work at the Valley Pit and through the patronage of J.T.Williamson, the manager of the Company, and by his own ability, he eventually became the Political Agent for the West Staffordshire Liberal Association in 1893.²⁵ Murphy encouraged the mission to grow out of the community by relying on local support for its existence. In July 1883 R.Snape, a popular local preacher

from Calf Heath, held two special services to raise money for supplying the Sunday school with furniture and books.

Murphy bade farewell to Hednesford on August 20, 1883. "When he came," he said, "he found not only a large population, but a good band of workers who were ready to go with him and work for the Master. At first there were only a few, and in order to conduct open-air services they were glad to borrow their Primitive Methodist friends, but now they could support two or three mission bands. He believed the open-air services and the mission work was in great measure the secret of their success. When he came to Hednesford the membership of the church was about fifty, and now, including those on trial, it was two hundred; the quarterly income for the support of the ministry was from £13 to £15; now it was nearly double; there was a large increase in the Sunday-school; and mission rooms had been opened in Bradbury Lane and Old Hednesford. He had rejoiced in the right of the poor to have the gospel preached... He liked the colliers, it was amongst them that he learnt to love mission work. If he had done colliers any good he was only trying to pay off an old score. He was thankful for all the kindness he and his wife had received, not from his own people alone, but Church people, the members of other churches, the Salvation Army, and from all with whom he had been brought into contact..."²⁶

3. The Salvation Army Revival

As the revival activity of the Methodists subsided from the winter of 1882, the Salvation Army appeared upon the scene. It made a dramatic impact upon Hednesford. The space between the railway station and the market hall - where the first open-air service was held on March 19, 1882, - were thronged by a crowd numbering some thousands.²⁷ A few weeks later, on Saturday May 6, 1882 a small contingent from Hednesford was holding

an open-air meeting in Cannock market place. By February 1883 the Cannock Advertiser was commenting that: "The Cannock contingent of this Army still continues to work hard in the streets of the town and at their "Barracks" in the Hednesford Road. The earnestness and sincerity of the promoters, combined with the remarkable conversions which there is reason to believe have taken place augur well for the future... Over 200 persons have "professed Christ" since the Cannock branch has been started." From the testimonies of those who had professed Christ the Advertiser inferred that "These testimony-bearers are from the rougher classes generally, and judging from their forcible speeches, though ungrammatical and unrefined some of them are, there is sufficient proof that a remarkable work is going on."²⁸

The years between 1878 and 1881 were years of transition for the Salvation Army as it gradually embraced the use of military language, uniform, and music.²⁹ These features are mentioned incidentally in the Advertiser's accounts of their activities. The opening mission in Hednesford was described as a "bombardment", open-air meetings as "exercises," and converts as "prisoners".³⁰ At the open-air meeting held in Cannock on Christmas Day 1882 the Captain wore a "simple uniform" beneath his overcoat whilst the rank and file wore the simple insignia of an "S" on their clothing. Some of the women wore the distinctive Army bonnet. It was also noted that there were "several players on brass instruments and several tambourines..³¹ The fact that women officers tended to be better educated than the men officers was brought out by the appointment of Lieutenant Wilkinson in June 1882. She was "a young lady of not more than nineteen years of age. Evidently she has received a good education.. [for] during the singing of one of the popular tunes she aptly volunteered to sing the chorus in French."³² She, like many officers, was also a convert from another denomination finding an outlet for evangelism in the Salvation Army that she could not

find in her own church. She was a former Anglican. Captain Bates, who addressed an enthusiastic audience packed into the Public Room at Cannock on Monday February 26, 1883, described himself as a former wealthy Wesleyan manufacturer who had paid out over £400 a week in wages. Then he fell prey to dissipated habits which gradually plunged him into personal and financial ruin until he was saved by the evangelistic work of the Salvation Army.³³

The Army received its coveted "baptism by fire" in April 1883. On Monday March 26, the Hednesford and Cannock Corps joined forces for an impressive display of strength in Cannock. About 400 persons formed "a large and showy procession" headed by a band and marched with colours flying and singing to the music of the band from Cannock to Bridgtown and back again before holding a meeting in the market place given over to prayer, praise, testimony and preaching. A normal open-air meeting was held on the following Sunday morning under the supervision of a young, inexperienced officer from Hednesford. The Vicar of Cannock asked for, and received permission to speak on the understanding that he would give a religious message. The Vicar, however, proceeded to take issue with some stinging criticisms made by General Booth about the clergy of the Anglican Church. When the young man in charge realised that the Vicar was attacking General Booth, he asked the Vicar either to stop speaking altogether or to confine his words to the subject of salvation. Words were exchanged. Some of the crowd present felt that the Vicar had been publicly insulted and proceeded to stir up ill-feeling in the town against the Salvationists. On the following Tuesday, April 2, when the Salvationists gathered in the market place for their usual meeting they were met by a large, hostile crowd who subjected them to "a great deal of very rough usage, being hustled about and howled at and hissed at.." The presence of the police prevented more serious forms of

violence being inflicted upon the Salvationists who were forced to retire to their barracks in the Hednesford Road. The following evening another hostile crowd carrying a drum and other noisy instruments began to gather in the market place. They were approached by the Vicar who asked them to be quiet and not to cause an uproar. The people present moved away only to gather in large numbers outside the Army's barracks. Again the Vicar went to speak to them. He assured them that he had not been insulted in any way on the Sunday morning, and that he was sorry that the incident had been the cause of such unpleasant scenes. He called upon the crowd to disperse quietly in an orderly manner. Because they were reluctant to do so he gave them a short religious message before calling on them to follow him to the parish church where he would conduct a short religious service for them. A great many of those present accepted his invitation. The remainder returned to the market place where they held a desultory demonstration before dispersing to their homes. Undeterred by the opposition the Salvationists were back in the market place for another meeting on the Thursday evening "but beyond some hooting and hissing, they got back to their barracks without being further molested."³⁴ The Army authorities acted promptly when they were informed of the incidents. By April 14 two experienced female officers had arrived in Cannock to take charge of the situation.³⁵

The editor of the Cannock Advertiser seemed to think that the crowd had used the Sunday morning confrontation between the Vicar and the young Salvation Army officer as an excuse for rowdy behaviour. There is an element of truth in the claim for the mob violence that had been directed against the first Methodist preachers had been "of a peculiarly English type... It had not the sinister significance which is typical of mobs in many other parts of the world, for though it was brutal and uncontrolled for a short time, it soon spent itself, and became open to an appeal for fair play... Here was a new sport."³⁶

Certainly the great majority of the crowd was soon quietened down by the vicar and responded to his appeals to give the Salvationists no further trouble. There are indications that many of the crowd did feel that the vicar had been insulted. At this time there was a great deal of popular respect for religion on the Chase. Shortly after his arrival in Cannock in 1880 the vicar began to hold a series of open-air meetings in the market place. The crowds were orderly and attentive. At the close of one service a bystander asked the vicar two questions to which the vicar gave reasonable replies. When the man began to speak blasphemously the vicar walked away and the man was hissed by the crowd "for his undue display of ignorance and vulgarity."³⁷ Some of the violence directed against the Salvationists, therefore, was in the time honoured way of expressing hostility by villagers and townsfolk towards those whom they felt to be threatening the standing and dignity of the established Church. It was a resurfacing of the eighteenth century feeling that "the Church Militant had the right to use a certain amount of deterrent force against those who threaten it."³⁸ It only needed the alleged affront to the dignity of the vicar on the Sunday morning to rouse the mob to the defence of local honour in the time honoured way. "A root cause" of the riots against the early Methodist preachers according to John Walsh "probably lay in the feelings of xenophobia and outraged traditionalism aroused by the 'new religion'. The preacher was an intruder, a stranger, and an agitator... Sometimes he came with an escort of supporters, which lent his arrival something of the air of a hostile demonstration."³⁹ The Salvationists were certainly strangers "professing"- as the editor of the Cannock Advertiser put it- "come to do good among us." And, as J.H.Dunkley a miner and Wesleyan local preacher once said, "In many respects the old miners were more or less isolationists, as newcomers were not welcomed and a stranger was treated as an outcast."

The later generation of Salvationists interpreted their persecution in traditional terms as well. Since the parish priest was often the one who incited the mob to violence in the eighteenth century, they claimed that the violence was the work of the Skeleton Army formed to drive the Salvationists out of Cannock because they were being so successful. The persecution became so bitter that the women members were not allowed to attend the open-air meetings at which so many of the men were receiving injuries. The Vicar, initially opposed to the Salvationists, came down on their side at a critical moment of the violence. He told the mob about to attack the Salvationists, "I am sorry friends. I have an apology to make. I have been mistaken in these people. I find out that they are people of God and here to do good, and from now on will never raise my hand against them. I advise you to do the same."⁴⁰

3. The Primitive Methodist Revival

The Lichfield Primitive Methodist Circuit was in need of revival in the early 1880s. On the crest of the wave of the mining boom of the 1870s the circuit lost two out of its four ministers; eleven out of its twenty-one chapels; and 368 of its 750 members in 1877 with the formation of the Bloxwich and Cannock Circuit. The reorganisation took place under the superintendency of William Wright who was converted under the revivalist preaching of James Huff - whom he was to follow as the superintendent minister of the Lichfield Circuit in 1877. Wright was a very effective revivalist and throughout his ministerial career he was: "seen at his best out of doors; speaking in the street, conducting a Camp Meeting, or delivering the 'address' at some district gathering or Conference." The sight of a crowd set him on fire, and there was "soon a general conflagration." He was estimated to stand "in the front rank" of the Connexion's evangelists.⁴¹

The reduction in the size of the circuit coincided with the onset of the depression in the coal industry. The membership declined from 382 to 330 in two years. The first three years of the reduced circuit were a continuous tale of woe. A request to be relieved of the financial burden of supporting a second minister was refused in 1879, a second request the following year however was granted because the circuit debt was considerable despite "ordinary and special efforts" to reduce it, and because: "Out of 373 enrolled with us as members, many through poverty, contributed nothing to our funds. And as the mining operations is all we can depend upon; and there being no prospect of better times, you will judge at once the importance of our appeal and, if possible relieve the Circuit from the prospect of deeper humiliation."⁴²

The arrival of William Evans as the only minister in 1882 dispelled the mood of defeat and pessimism which prevailed in the circuit. He embarked at once on a vigorous, optimistic policy of open-air missioning, chapel-building, and debt reduction. In the five years that he spent in the circuit: new chapels were built at Brownhills and Clayhanger; two-thirds of the cost for one at Chasetown was raised; £534 was paid off the circuit debt; generous contributions were made to the Connexional funds; and 96 members added to the total membership of the circuit through a programme of holding Camp Meetings and other open-air meetings whenever the weather and other circumstances permitted.⁴³ Evans was one of the efficient, much sought after, new style "managerial" ministers common to Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist achieving steady growth and expansion through, the by now general, Methodist ideal of revival without revivalism. The low new membership figures conceal the revival that was taking place on the eastern, as well as on the western, part of the Chase. The true state of affairs is revealed by the figures for the number of adherents attending worship in each chapel. The number of these adherents increased

between 1880 and 1885 by 45.5% from 835 worshippers to 1215 worshippers. The sharpest increase was between 1880 and 1883 when it was 25.4% - from 835 to 1120.⁴⁴

Joseph Shenton carried on the work of the revival. The project for the new chapel at Chasetown begun under William Evans was completed in 1887. The circuit was made financially viable as debts on the Lichfield chapel were cleared, and the debts to the connexional Chapel Fund considerably reduced through the gift of £580 by "a lover of the circuit". The circuit could now afford to hire the help of a local preacher as a lay assistant to the minister. Shenton carried on the programme of Camp Meetings and open-air services in the streets of the district. There were 93 new members in 1887, 43 in 1888, and 47 in 1889; but these additions were not reflected in the returns of the total membership since they only served to "fill up the vacancies caused by removals, non-attendance, deaths etc."⁴⁵ The mention of non-attendance is revealing. Shenton did not have the time to follow up the conversions with regular house-to-house visitation. A writer on house-to-house visitation in the Primitive Methodist Magazine for 1886 made the observation: "Much of the minister's time in large towns is occupied with circuit business, in collecting money to prevent or to liquidate debts on our chapels, or in begging and arranging for tea meetings... systematic visitation of all the members [is] all but impossible for some of our visitors."⁴⁶ The tide of revival was ebbing away for between 1886 and 1888 the number of adherents increased by only 1.5% -1290 to 1310.

Shenton was followed in 1890 by Harvey Roe. He consolidated the work of his two predecessors. Two new chapels were built - at Walsall Wood in 1893, and at Brownhills West in 1894. The restoration of the circuit's financial health was confirmed in 1892 with the re-appointment of a second minister. The continuous programme of Camp Meetings and open-air meetings in the local streets brought another 100 new members onto the

Circuit Roll between 1890 and 1894; but the fact that the number of adherents increased by only 1.6% between 1890 and 1894 while the total membership increased by 10.6% suggests that the revival was over, and that Harvey Roe was drawing his new membership from the pool of adherents created by the revival of the preceding decade. There was, however, a local revival at Walsall Wood between 1889 and 1892 which led to the building of a new chapel in 1893 alongside the original one of 1861. The Jubilee Souvenir of 1941 simply stated that from the enlargement of the original chapel in 1874 to the year 1891: "The church and Sunday school continued to grow, by the time the building was free of debt it was evident that a larger Church would be needed."⁴⁷ The statement mirrors the experience of the local community. Originally the locality was an area of scattered waste to the north of Walsall inhabited by nailmakers, chainmakers and miners, living in extreme poverty. The place was noted for its mud hovels, ragged inhabitants, destitution and wild ways. The development of mining on a larger scale within the area, and the opening of brickyards, led to a gradual increase in the size of the population, and a dramatic change in their living standards. The village was missioned by a team of Primitive Methodists from the Mount Zion chapel at nearby Brownhills in 1861, and a chapel was built in 1863 consisting of one room capable of seating 150 people, and served by one window and one door. In the twenty years between 1871 and 1891 the size of the population doubled from 2,077 to 4,582. In 1891 the inhabitants "consisted of shopkeepers, colliers, brick-makers, and a few small farmers.." The opening of the extremely deep and productive Walsall Wood Colliery in 1879, and the coming of the railway in 1882, played major parts in the expansion of the community.⁴⁸ The local Primitive Methodists tried to keep pace with the growth of the community as the steady growth of the membership demonstrates: 30 members in 1879; 59 in 1889; 65 in 1890; and 73 in 1892. A look at the number of

adherents shows that there were 150 in 1889, and 300 in 1892. This 100% growth in the number of adherents compared with the 23.7% growth in membership during the same years suggests that there was a local revival between 1889 and 1892.

The achievements of Evans, Shenstone, and Roe must be set against the West Midland District's experience of consistent decline. It was recorded at the District meeting of 1880 that: "The delegates were pained to find that through the numerous removals and the continued depression in trade and other causes, a decrease of 63 members had to be recorded."⁴⁹ A somewhat flippant note was struck in 1886 when no less a person than Joseph Odell said: "It was a subject of great regret that a decrease should be reported for the district, and it was hoped that a new spirit would be infused into the circuits, or it might be found that Primitive Methodism would be dead around its cradle."⁵⁰ At the District Meeting of 1893 there was a decrease of 46 members reported.⁵¹ Evans, Shenstone, and Roe fought against all the odds to maintain a steady rhythm of growth through a series of ministries in the modern managerial style favoured by Jabez Bunting - while Murphy had kept and extended his section of the Wesleyan Cannock Chase circuit after the manner of a Primitive Methodist revivalist like William Wright!

4. The Anglican Revival

One historian of the Anglican Church in Staffordshire claims that, "by the end of the century the Church in Staffordshire had done much to meet the needs of the times. This was accomplished not only by outstanding bishops but also by a number of capable parish clergy."⁵² Among these capable parish clergy must be numbered Charles Nelson Bolton, Vicar of Cannock between 1880 and 1895. He moved to Cannock from All Saints, Darlington, in October 1880 with the reputation of being "a good preacher - one who had faith in outdoors as well as indoors services - a musician and athlete."⁵³ The text of his

first sermon was Luke 15,2: 'This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.' - "he earnestly and forcibly appealed to the unsaved to at once throw up everything that kept them back from making peace with God through Christ... no misdeed of the past, be it of whatever nature, would be mentioned by Him who is ever ready to receive sinners and to eat with them at the Holy Sacrament." Bolton underlined the importance he placed upon the Sacrament with the formation of a Communicant Society in April 1881. One hundred people joined the Society which planned to hold monthly meetings at Cannock, Bridgtown and Chadsmoor. Each member was given a card on which were printed the dates and venues of the meetings which he was required to keep as a register of his attendances "so that the Vicar will be able to see how they are progressing in spiritual things."⁵⁴

In August 1882, William MacLagen, the Bishop of Lichfield, appointed H. Algernon Colville, a former colonel in the Salvation Army, as a lay evangelist for the Diocese.⁵⁵ Colville held a fortnight's mission in Cannock and Chadsmoor between June 16 and June 30, 1883. It was a traditional revival event. The meetings were well attended and many people were brought forward to the penitent form under a conviction of sin. People testified to the transforming power of faith in Christ in their lives. A chimney sweep told of his numerous imprisonments in Stafford Gaol, of his having to be manacled in moments of vicious despair, and of how his family had been reduced to near starvation and destitution; " 'but now,' he added with a well lighted face, 'all this changed as old things have passed away, and all things become new.'"⁵⁶ Colville, himself, preached traditional "hell-fire" sermons. At one meeting he: "told those assembled that they may have been baptized and confirmed, take the Sacrament, and be Sunday school teachers, district visitors and helpers of the clergy in various ways, but none of these, nor all of them combined, will avail them unless a thorough out-and-out conversion had taken place in the heart. Any one thing that

keeps the soul away from God, be it apparently of an insignificant and unimportant nature, is of itself sufficient to doom the soul to everlasting destruction. People, outwardly, may have lived religious lives, and yet be as great a distance from God, in so far as safety for the next world is concerned, as the vilest of sinners. He solemnly warned all such not to let this state of things go any longer, for if they did they might have occasion to call upon 'the rocks and mountains to fall upon them' some day, when it would be too late, as death might come to them at any moment. He exhorted them to make their calling and election sure whilst they had it in their power, for they must leave this world and all they possess, under any circumstances, in a very short time, and it was of vital importance that ere it be too late heaven should be secured."⁵⁷

Bolton had inherited a scheme from his predecessor, T.W.Peile, for the renovation and enlargement of the parish church which he brought to a successful conclusion with the re-opening of St.Luke's on Wednesday October 18, 1882. Bolton intoned the morning service, and there was a full choral service in the evening.⁵⁸ At the evening service on the following Sunday Bolton explained the reasons for his introduction of the new ritual which was highly unpopular in many reaches of English society from Queen Victoria downwards because of "the steady belief that the High Churchmen conspired to make England Roman Catholic in an age when no popery was still powerful an emotion..⁵⁹ Bolton's one objective was to reach the working classes and the experience of Ritualist priests like the Pollock brothers at Birmingham and Mandell Creighton at Leicester seemed to show that working class people responded to the skilful use of colour, music and ceremony in producing a display that counteracted "the often bleak working-class urban environment of the late nineteenth century." This kind of worship needed to be backed up with evangelical preaching, an emphasis on "parish work with its plethora of clubs and parish

organizations", and a willingness to enter even the poorest homes.⁶⁰ The first thing Bolton had done on entering the parish was to form a Church-workers Union. At the inaugural meeting he had called for "more Sunday school teachers and district visitors, conductors of cottage meetings in outlying districts, Sunday teachers for the children in the Workhouse, helpers in night schools, assistants for open-air meetings, and for someone to take charge of young children in school on Sunday mornings instead of taking them to church as at present."⁶¹ Branches of the Church Army were created at Chads Moor, Bridgtown, and Huntington. On Easter Monday 1884 a united service was held in the open-air at Shoal Hill, Cannock when "a large ring was formed [and] many stepped inside to bear testimony to conversion from drink."⁶² Out of 127 candidates for confirmation at Hednesford in May 1884 no less than 105 were from the parish of Cannock, the majority being "principally the result of the mission work that has been carried on by the clergy and missionaries of late..⁶³

Under the stimulus of Evangelical clergymen from 1850 onwards a new pattern for parochial missions had been established by 1874: "It included careful preparation, initial gatherings of day helpers, mid-day services and special meetings for particular people, weekday evening services, after-meetings, and counselling."⁶⁴ A model mission of this kind was conducted by the Rev. C. Bodington, the Lichfield Diocesan caravan missionary since 1869, at Cannock in January 1888. The ten day mission began, "After much preparation and tract-distribution by the clergy and district visitors of the parish." Proceedings commenced with a reception service in the church on the Saturday evening. On the Sunday there were services in the morning and evening with special services in the afternoon for children and their parents at 2.30 p.m., and for men at 3.30 p.m. Special services were held in the church every evening. Bodington, accompanied by some of the parish clergy, visited several collieries and works in the district to hold meetings. He also paid several

visits to the National Schools to instruct the children in religious knowledge. Two addresses - one in the Iron Room, and one in the Infant School - were delivered to women by a Miss Poundall of the Lichfield Mission.⁶⁵

Bolton's growing concern for the spiritual welfare of the common people; his philanthropy on their behalf; and his active, persistent evangelism eventually won their support for the Church of England. At St. Luke's the measure of the Church's success in attracting the working classes was the size and composition of the collections. In 1883 the offertory totalled £54 and was made up of 6,886 coins. In 1890 the offertory totalled £112 and was made up of 12,830 coins.⁶⁶

5. From Revivalism To Respectability

Wesleyan Methodism on Cannock Chase reached its high water mark during the 1880s. For the six quarters between March 1884 and December 1885 the membership of the 18 to 21 Societies which constituted the Cannock Chase Wesleyan Circuit topped the 800 mark. The highest figure recorded was in September 1884 when a membership of 849 was returned.⁶⁷ The numerous mentions in the Quarterly Meetings of this period to the harmful effects of fluctuating movements in the coal trade on circuit membership and finances due to the removal of members in search of more regular employment elsewhere indicate that, despite all the efforts of men like Murphy to reach the unchurched masses, the kind of people drawn into the membership of the Methodist Church were those already affiliated to the church, like migrant Methodists feeling rootless in a new community, and young people from a religious background like Albert Foster, also seeking to find their niche in the young, growing communities of the Chase coalfield. This view is reinforced by the opposite experience of the Primitive Methodist Church on the East Shropshire coalfield where the mass exodus of its workers brought about "a pattern of decline.. in every aspect

of the life of the coalfield."⁶⁸ A minister was sent to the Dawley and Madeley Primitive Methodist Circuit with instructions "either to set the circuit on its feet or sell out and wind up our connection with the district."⁶⁹

The great danger to the growth of Methodism in working class communities like those on Cannock Chase was the growing respectability of the working classes allied to a decline in the neurotic character of popular religion. Religion became more "friendly" in the sense that "hellfire preaching" gradually went out of favour. In 1863 the Judicial Committee of the Church of England ruled that since the Thirty-Nine Articles did not teach any definite doctrine of the future punishment of the wicked, H.B.Wilson's assertion that the idea of eternal punishment for the wicked was not consistent with the idea of a loving, merciful God was not contrary to the teaching of the Established Church.⁷⁰ In 1872 Cornelius Stovin, a Lincolnshire farmer, was deploring the loss of the Evangelical message in the preaching of his New Connexion minister: "He speaks too much of man's nobility and not enough of his shame, dwells unwarrantably upon his greatness and heroism, not enough upon his misery and degradation. The terrors of the Lord appear to be under an eclipse in our modern pulpit."⁷¹ Popular religion emphasized the importance of benevolence in life. The great mass of people wanted a reasonably happy and secure life. Suffering and hardship were not major problems since they could be related to popular beliefs in luck, fate, chance, astrology and other forms of superstition. It was the duty of a benevolent God to ensure that one had a fair deal in life, - and suffering only became a problem when the individual or community felt that they had not been given a fair deal as in some form of tragic, undeserved death for a popular, respected person. The popular image of God was that of the benevolent "Good Shepherd" who provided for the needs of His people and protected them from harm. Edwin Ellis, a miner from Ogley Hay near Brownhills, who

volunteered to serve with the Grenadier Guards on the Western Front in 1914, carried with him a copy of a poem called "Mizpah" which expressed the belief that God's providential care unites and preserves His creatures though they be far apart:

*"Go thou thy way and I go mine,
Apart yet not afar,
Only a thin veil hangs between
The pathways where we are.
And "God keep watch 'tween me and thee",
This is my prayer,
He holds thy hand, He holdeth mine,
And keeps us near."*⁷²

This belief in God's benevolent presence was enmeshed within a network of popular superstitions. At baptism the baby was pinched to make its tears drive away the devil. Until the baby had been baptized the mother was a social outcast unable to make or to receive visits. A married woman never removed her wedding ring from her finger lest its loss or damage lead to the loss of her chastity. A robin perched on a house on Christmas Day meant that a death would take place in the family during the coming year, as did cinders flying out of the fire. In the household care was taken not to cross knives, or to stir with a knife, or to pass one another on the stairs in order to prevent strife within the household. Spilt salt was thrown over the left shoulder with the right hand. Black cats crossing one's path brought luck but walking under a ladder was unlucky. The miner was subject to all kinds of omens. To dream of a broken shoe or a fire; to meet a woman as dawn was breaking; to see a bright light down the mine; to smell foul smells; to hear noises like a pack of hounds or bird-like cries overhead; these were all signs to the wise, discerning

collier that danger was near and either not to go to work or to down tools and to get out of the pit as quickly as possible. Evil spirits and harmful influences could be driven away by taking a Bible and key, holding them both in the right hand, and saying the Lord's Prayer.⁷³

Benevolence was the moral basis of popular religion.⁷⁴ The essence of Christianity was expressed in the image of "The Good Samaritan" and its teaching about the duty to be a good neighbour to those in need. One did not have to go to Church in order to meet one's obligation to one's neighbour as expressed in "A Poor Man's Song":

*Oh come to the ingle-side,
For the night is dark and drear;
The snow is deep and the mountains wide
Then stay and rest thee here;
My board is simply spread,
I have a little food to spare,
But thou shalt break my wholesome bread,
And have a wholesome share.
For while the faggot burns
To warm my cottage floor,
They never shall say the poor man turns,
A poorer from his door.*"⁷⁵

It was not an empty sentiment. During the bitter coal strike of 1893 it was reported of the miners on Cannock Chase that "cases of the poor helping the poor are frequent. The crop of potatoes is shared with a neighbour who has none, and even the savings of past months or years have been divided."⁷⁶

The growing restraint of popular religion was matched by the growing desire of the more ambitious and affluent members of the labouring classes to be accepted by those above them in the social scale as responsible members of society. In the sixth week of the bitterly contested Great Federation Lockout of 1893 a line of trucks belonging to the West Cannock Colliery Company was unbraked and allowed to run into a siding with such force that two of the trucks were derailed. One of them loaded with hay for the pit ponies caught fire and was gutted. The proceedings were watched by a group of youths and women who were blamed for having committed the act of vandalism. Police were brought from Stafford to guard the colliery premises against further attacks. Also on the scene was the Rev. Arthur O'Neill, a Baptist minister from Birmingham, who was a noted champion of the rights of the working classes for a decent living wage.⁷⁷ He convened a public meeting on the lawn outside the Anglesey Hotel at Hednesford which was attended by about 1500 people. He felt that the act of wanton destruction was out of character with what he knew of the Cannock miners, and he felt that the incident should not be allowed to pass without protest. The meeting passed the resolution: "That we express regret at the destroying of fodder that occurred last night at the West Cannock Colliery, which we consider was caused chiefly by foolish mischievous youths, and we pledge to do all in our power to preserve peace and order."⁷⁸

Here was a gesture by the working classes to affirm their growing sense of being responsible and respectable members of society. The appeal of the drama and rowdiness of popular revivalism with its impassioned preaching and pleas to be saved; the cries and sobs of the converted at the penitent rail; and the spontaneous, noisy corporate prayers of the congregation on their behalf would cease to appeal to the more restrained, respectable, working class that was emerging. The nature of the future appeal to their religious

sensibilities was to be found in the Congregational church at Rugeley where a gifted young preacher, Campbell Morgan, had been the pastor since August 1891. His Pleasant Sunday Afternoon meetings: "which, lasting exactly an hour, are so arranged as to attract to the church many who would otherwise seldom or ever be seen within the walls of a place of worship. The service on these occasions is of a diversified character, consisting of instrumental and vocal music, lessons from the Bible, prayers and a short address. The hymns are taken from Sankey's collection, and are sung with great spirit and earnestness... So great has been the success of this Sunday afternoon undertaking that the promoters have been encouraged to continue the effort.."⁷⁹

6. Conclusion

On Monday July 30, 1883 the Chadsmoor Church Army Mission was inaugurated. After a tea party in the church mission-room, a procession headed by the parish clergy made its way around the village singing hymns. It stopped twice to form a ring in which converts of the Church Army Mission in Wolverhampton "spoke to the people boldly testifying to the power and willingness of the Saviour to forgive the sins of all who came to him if they were willing to forsake them." At the after-meeting five men were chosen to become captain, lieutenant, and three sergeants, to engage in the mission work the parish clergy were unable to do because of the parochial duties required of them in such a large parish.⁸⁰ In the Church of England, as in the Methodist Connexions, the parish priest was becoming a manager forced to delegate the task of promoting revival to others - not only to local laymen but to itinerant revivalists as well.

The incident serves to illustrate how closely the religious bodies on Cannock Chase had drawn together in the methods they employed to promote the revival of religion on the Chase. Murphy used a style of evangelism at Hednesford which had been refined in the

1850s and was a blend of methods going right back to the earliest days of Methodism: open-air preaching, house-to-house visitation, school-missions like those at Bradbury Lane and Old Hednesford fostered by a mother church like the Wesleyan chapel at Hednesford, tract distribution, and revival missions conducted by specialist revival missionaries like Charlesworth, Pickering, Byron and Daniels. These missionaries borrowed methods from the Primitive Methodists. The singing processions used by Byron to advertise and to attract people to his services in Cannock were a feature of Primitive Methodist camp-meetings used to mark the transition from the preaching to the praying stages of a meeting. At a camp-meeting held at Gloucester in 1837 two men delivered addresses from a portion of scripture, after which the party formed into two groups and proceeded to two different parts of the field singing as they went hymns set to popular tunes of the day.⁸¹ Daniel's system of three open-air meetings a day followed by an evening service was also borrowed from the Primitive Methodists. In the 1830s they developed a system of street missioning using two methods. At Manchester, during the summer months of 1837, Samuel Smith held "seven or eight prayer meetings, and five or six short sermons" lasting between one to one-and-a-half hours in the open-air every Friday night. As a variant he held what he called a mission fellowship meeting when "We formed a large circle in Woodward street" and the preachers "by turns mounted a heap of stones and spoke of [their] experiences." Smith made the following six points about the correct use of this method: it was not to be used "the first time of going into a neighbourhood", a large circle must be made with "the professors standing in front", children were to stand either inside the circle or in front of the supporters, speakers must be men of proven Christian character, speaking must be audible to all, "short and to the point", and heckling should be discouraged.⁸² This latter method seems to have formed the basis of the Salvation Army's system of urban

evangelism. They, however, used it the first time of going into a new neighbourhood. The Army paid its first visit to Cannock on Saturday October 15, 1881 when a circle was formed and addresses delivered: "The last part of the proceedings was a 'knee drill', in which anyone who felt desirous was invited to join the circle - an invitation which no one accepted. Beyond two or three coarse remarks by bystanders the little band was allowed to conduct their service unmolested."⁸³ The use of the circle goes back to the earliest days of Methodist open-air preaching when it served as a protective ring for the preacher. By 1795 it had become a revivalist technique for identifying people labouring under a conviction of sin, and for providing them with the emotional support and prayer they needed to gain the certainty of forgiveness. John Moon had noted at Sheffield during the great revival of 1795 that, "Even little boys and girls have now prayer meetings among themselves; and one company of lads meets constantly in a field, in the evening when the weather is fine; they form a circle, and pray for each other till they have some signal and answer of divine approbation."⁸⁴

The great concern which animated all the religious bodies on the Chase was the revival of true, vital, inward scriptural religion. Although the emphasis in this and the preceding chapter is on the activities of the Methodists, Salvation Army, and Anglicans, the other religious bodies were active as well. J.B.Lee founded the Baptist chapel at Chads Moor in 1879. His achievement in building up a viable congregation from scratch earned him an invitation to Coates in Oxfordshire - one of the oldest and most influential Baptist churches in the country.⁸⁵ A.Cook, the Congregational minister at Cannock, secured one of the most notable converts of the period in the person of C.W.Cremer, the Dutch civil engineer who was supervising the sinking of the Littleton pit at Huntington in 1876. He came to Cannock as a sceptic of "the French and continental type" and left in 1880 as an ordained

Congregational minister bound for work as an evangelist with the Continental evangelical Society.⁸⁶ The period saw the revival of Roman Catholicism on the Chase due to the influx of Irish labour. The Clifford family which succeeded to Hatherton Hall were Catholics and opened part of the Hall for the holding of Mass in 1873. A school-chapel was opened in John Street, Cannock in 1878 with its own resident priest. In 1898 a school-chapel was opened at Hill Top, Hednesford, and in 1880 the chapel of The Sacred Heart and Our Lady was opened on the Walsall Road, Cannock.⁸⁷ A Mass centre served by a priest from Lichfield was opened in a shop at Chasetown in 1882, and a church dedicated to St. Joseph was built in 1883.⁸⁸

A common concern for promoting revival may have helped to create the common feeling of goodwill between the different religious bodies on the Chase. The opening of the Wesleyan Methodist chapel at Norton Canes on April 30, 1882 was followed by tea in the schoolroom of the local Primitive Methodist church. The chairman, T.H.Cope, "referred to the kindness of the Primitive Methodists in lending them their premises, and spoke of the time when a Wesleyan meeting in a Primitive chapel would have been out of the question, but was glad those days of jealousy and opposition were over, and that among all Christian churches union was the great theme."⁸⁹ Cope was not voicing an empty sentiment. The desire for closer union between the churches on Cannock Chase in the 1880s was expressed in many ways. The Primitive Methodist bazaar at Hednesford was opened by a Mr. A. Baker who declared himself to be a Wesleyan "but his heart was large enough to help any that were doing good."⁹⁰ The Nonconformists objected to the action of the Local Board in using ratepayers money to pay the fee for consecrating the new burial ground at Oldfallows in 1882; but when a representative from the Liberation Society congratulated them on opposing the Vicar of Cannock's attempt to make Nonconformists contribute towards the

cost of consecrating the burial ground he was told that the quarrel was with the Local Board - not the Vicar, who was a good Christian man and evangelical minister.⁹¹ Goodwill marked the introduction of the Burial Law Amendment Act which permitted Nonconformists to be interred in Anglican churchyards. At Brewood "Every facility for the service was afforded by the vicar whose absence from Brewood.. prevented him from taking part in the service which he should, he explained, have liked to conduct in the church."⁹² Finally, the Temperance Movement brought together representatives of all the religious bodies. At Cannock the Vicar was the President of the local Band of Hope, a Methodist was the chairman and a Roman-Catholic was on the committee.⁹³

Endnotes

- 1.Cole and Postgate, *The Common People 1746-1946* (1964), 403
- 2.*Cannock Advertiser*, 27/09/1879
- 3.W.T.R.Pryce, editor, *From Family History to Community History* (1994), 21
- 4.J.Benson, "The Autobiography of Albert Edward Foster" in *West Midlands Studies.*, Volume 11 (1978), 34-35
- 5.H.Johnson, *Stories of Great Revivals* (1906), 339
- 6.The Chairman of every Wesleyan Methodist district was charged with the duty of reading aloud to his colleagues once a year The Liverpool Minutes of 1820 which contained the stirring resolve: "let every Methodist Preacher consider himself as called to be, in point of enterprise, zeal, and diligence, a Home Missionary, and to enlarge and extend, as well as keep, the Circuit to which he is appointed." This objective was to be achieved by preaching the vital doctrines of the Gospel; by giving oneself exclusively to the work of saving souls; and by using the time-honoured methods of field preaching, prayer-meetings, watch-night services, band-meetings, and days of solemn fasting and prayer. H.W.Williams. *The Constitution and Polity of Wesleyan Methodism* (1880) 323-329
- 7.*Cannock Advertiser* 11/09/1880
- 8.*Cannock Advertiser* 01/01/1881
- 9.*Cannock Advertiser* 05/02/1881
- 10.*Cannock Advertiser* 04/06/1881
- 11.*Cannock Advertiser* 11/6/1881
- 12.*Cannock Advertiser* 02/07/1881
- 13.*Cannock Advertiser* 28/10/1881
- 14.*Cannock Advertiser* 26/11/1881
- 15.*Cannock Advertiser* 06/1/1882
- 16.*Cannock Advertiser* 28/01/1882
17. *ibid*
- 18.*Cannock Advertiser* 04/02/1882
- 19.*Cannock Advertiser* 04/02/1882
- 20.E.P.Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin 1968), 919
- 21.*Cannock Advertiser* 05/05/1883
- 22.*Cannock Advertiser* 05/05/1883
- 23.*Cannock Advertiser* 19/05/1883

24. *Cannock Advertiser* 30/06/1883
25. *Cannock Advertiser* 06/10/1917
26. *Cannock Advertiser* 25/8/1883
27. *Cannock Advertiser* 25/03/1882
28. *Cannock Advertiser* 17/02/1883
29. O.Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Volume 1 (1972), 291-294
30. *Cannock Advertiser* 25/03/1882
31. *Cannock Advertiser* 30/12/1882
32. *Cannock Advertiser* 24/06/1882
33. *Cannock Advertiser* 03/3/1883
34. *Cannock Advertiser* 07/04/1883
35. *Cannock Advertiser* 18/04/1883
36. L.F.Church, *More About the Early Methodist People* (1949), 64
37. *Cannock Advertiser* 23/07/1881
38. J.Walsh, "Methodism and the Mob in the Eighteenth Century" in *Studies in Church History*, Volume 8 (1972), 221
39. *ibid.*, 221
40. As told to the *Cannock Advertiser* March, 1954.
41. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1893, 129-130
42. *Brownhills* 398/15 (1879-90) Walsall Local History Centre
43. *Brownhills* 398/15 (1879-90) & *Brownhills* 398/17 (1848-1931), Walsall Local History Centre
44. *ibid.*
45. *ibid.*
46. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1886, 30
47. Walsall Wood Methodist Church *Jubilee Brochure* 1941, 2
48. *Victoria County History*, Volume 17, 227
49. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1880, 445
50. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1886, 441
51. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1893, 440
52. *Victoria County History*, Volume 2 (1967), 64
53. *Cannock Advertiser* 28/08/1880
54. *Cannock Advertiser* 07/05/1881
55. *Cannock Advertiser* 12/08/1882
56. *Cannock Advertiser* 23/06/1883
57. *Canock Advertiser* 30/06/1883
58. Under the stimulus of the High Church movement inaugurated by John Keble's Assize Sermon at St. Mary's, Oxford, on July 14, 1833 the growing conviction of many parish clergymen was that "one important way to approach the working man was by a more elaborate ritual." The result was that the customs of different parish churches, "began to differ more widely, especially after 1865, and a man accustomed to the usages of one church might more frequently feel strangeness if he entered another church." Owen Chadwick. *The Victorian Church*, Volume 2 (1972), 308. In 1892, out of the twenty-seven parish churches described by Alfred Williams, twelve of them including Cannock, Chasetown, Hednesford, and Rugeley had surpliced choirs, four of which had fully choral services. At the other extreme was Pipe Ridware parish church which could accommodate ninety worshippers, had no choir or organ, and a north wall badly disfigured by damp. A.Williams, *Sketches in and around Lichfield and Rugeley* (1892), 283] 59. O.Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Volume 2 (1972), 323
60. Bill Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism: Leicester Working Class Politics 1860-1906* (1987), 68 [Charles Booth, the sociologist, believed, however, that High Churchmen were successful with the working classes "not because of their mode of worship, but because their lives were more evidently self-denying, their enthusiasm more forceful." (Chadwick, 312) The Methodists also recognised the need for bright, cheerful surroundings and attractive services. Alfred Williams said of the services at the Wesleyan chapel at Rugeley where he was the organist that "The Wesleyans ... have moved with the times, and their services are now as bright and cheerful as those of any other denomination." A.Williams, *Sketches in and around Lichfield and Rugeley*[1992] 341)
61. *Cannock Advertiser* 26/02/1881
62. *Cannock Advertiser* 19/04/1884. The 1870s saw the birth of the great Victorian Crusade against Drink when temperance was linked to revivalist religion to produce the "Temperance Gospel." The movement"

swept through England with a special kind of revivalist fervour that mixed religion and temperance to form a distinctive creed. Its supporters felt that a soul could not be saved while the body was being continually corrupted by intemperance." L.L.Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink* [1988], 96. A Band of Hope was begun at Cannock in 1883. Four years later there were 18 societies in the Union with a membership of 1,474. There were 171 workers. *Cannock Advertiser* 19/11/1887

63. *Cannock Advertiser* 31/05/1884

64. K. Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England 1734-1984* (1988), 178

65. *Cannock Advertiser* 14/01/1888 [A miner called A. Spooner who started work at East Cannock Colliery in 1878 recalled sixty years later that: "Those were strange days down the pit. They then used to work by candlelight, and he ... carried many a candle to light the way of clergymen and members of the Salvation Army who used to hold services down the pit at 'snap time.' In those days each boy connected with certain religious organisations was presented with a testimony to use down the pit." *Cannock Advertiser* 1938]

66. *Cannock Advertiser* 28/02/1891

67. *Cannock Wesleyan Circuit Membership Roll Book 1880-1914*

68. B. Trinder, *The Industrial Revolution in Shropshire* (1981) 241

69. *ibid*

70. M. A. Crowther, *Church Embattled: Religious Controversy in Mid-Victorian Britain* (1970), 22

71. J. Stovin, editor, *Journals of a Methodist Farmer* (1982), 80

72. Courtesy of his daughter, Mrs. K. Fletcher of Kinver.

73. F. W. Hackwood, *Staffordshire: Customs, Superstitions, and Folklore* (1924) and Jon Raven, *The Folklore of Staffordshire* (1978)

74. "One clergyman grumbled to Charles Booth about the willingness of the working class to believe in a God to whom they ascribed their own vague humanitarian impulses and their own lax moral standards." K. Robbins, "The Churches in Edwardian Society" in D. Read, editor, *Edwardian England* (1982), 115

75. R. Heath, *The Victorian Peasant* (edited K. Dockray 1989) 147

76. *Cannock Advertiser* 16/9/1893 Over thirty years later Charles Hulbert could write of the people of Bradford: "Among the very poor I have found some beautiful instances of kindness and benevolence. Many instances I have known of one poor person being exceedingly kind and helpful to other poor folk." K. Hulbert, *Passion for Souls: The Story of Charles H. Hulbert* (1959), 79

77. Arthur G. O'Neill was born at Chelmsford in 1819 three months after the death of his Irish father. His step-father was a soldier and O'Neil was educated in Malta. After two years with the 73rd Regiment as a medical orderly he entered Glasgow University to study medicine. Following his evangelical conversion he changed to the study of divinity. The news of the atrocities committed by his former regiment in Canada in putting down the chartist rebellion there converted him to the cause of Chartism. On leaving university in 1840 he was invited to become the pastor of Newhall Street Chapel, Birmingham. In 1842 he was arrested at Cradley for holding a chartist meeting there, and in 1843 was sentenced to a years imprisonment. On his release he became pastor of the Zion Baptist Chapel at Birmingham where he remained until his retirement in 1885. During his ministry he was a constant advocate of reform in every direction. In retirement he was an advocate of international peace and arbitration. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1896, 609-610

78. *Cannock Advertiser* 23/09/1893

79. Williams, *Sketches in and around Lichfield*, 338 The P.S.A. was conceived by John Blackham of West Bromwich who was a Congregational layman. He asked a group of working men what was wrong with the traditional Men's Bible Class and was told: "Well, Gov'nor, we'en got nothin' agin the Bible, but you 'ave all your things so blessed dull." Whereupon he conceived his idea of the P.S.A meeting which would be "bright, brief and brotherly." Roland Bainton, *Pilgrim Parson* (1957) 15-16 Bainton was Blackham's grandson

80. *Cannock Advertiser* 04/08/1883

81. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1837, 430 The P.M.s themselves were only reviving the custom of the Early Methodists. Charles Wesley had led a procession of singing Methodists to Walsall from Wednesbury on Saturday May 24, 1743. Thomas Jackson, editor, *Charles Wesley's Journal*, Volume 1. The Wednesbury Methodists processed across the fields to Darlaston to hold cottage meetings in the home of John Adams, and sang hymns as they went.

82. *Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1837, 470

83. *Cannock Advertiser* 22/10/1881

84. quoted John Baxter, "The Great Yorkshire Revival 1792-1796: A Study of Mass Revival Among the Methodists" in *Sociological Yearbook of Religion*, Number 7 (1974), 60

85. *Cannock Advertiser* 27/5/1882

86. *Cannock Advertiser* February/1921

- 87. *Victoria County History*, Volume 5 (1959), 68
- 88. *Victoria County History*, Volume 14 (1990), 223
- 89. *Cannock Advertiser* 5/5/1883
- 90. *Cannock Advertiser* 17/12/1882
- 91. *Cannock Advertiser* 3/12/1881
- 92. *Cannock Advertiser* 07/05/1881
- 93. *Cannock Advertiser* 19/11/1887

Chapter Eight

THE RISE AND FALL OF WESLEYAN CATHOLICISM

1. Introduction

C.D.Field's recent analysis of the composition of Methodist membership up to the year 1830 in terms of its gender, marital status and occupational structure comes to the conclusion there are "some grounds for regarding early Methodism as an approximation of an authentically democratic movement, in that it represented, to a greater or lesser extent, most segments of the population."¹ The aim of this chapter is to seek an explanation for the wide range of Methodism's appeal in the popular religious consciousness of the English people which can be described as the residue of Roman Catholicism. This popular religious consciousness appears to have been prone to superstitious fear of witchcraft, fearful of the unpredictable, and terrified of the prospect of eternal damnation. The general Methodist belief of living in a world exposed to the agencies of beneficent and malign supernatural agencies provided a common meeting ground with this popular religious consciousness. What H.B.Kendall said of the early Primitive Methodists was true of Methodism as a whole from the days of John Wesley: "They lived amid the marvellous and the supernatural... the very atmosphere they breathed seemed surcharged with the supernatural.. They all dreamed, and told their dreams, and sought the interpretation thereof; for the dreams were regarded as full of religious significance, and as having a close bearing on the day's work and duty. Faith-healing and exorcism were also articles of belief.. They believed in the power of the evil one as working in the children of disobedience, and often it is felt to be a serious struggle between the malign power and the power which they can exercise through faith."² Thomas Taylor was on the Birstal Circuit

in 1778 when there was an extensive revival in which above seven hundred members were added to the Methodist societies. "I never knew so simple means made use of, in the hands of a gracious God, to bring sinners to Himself," he recorded. "Prayer-meetings were singularly useful, and so was the preaching; but thunder and lightning, dreams and visions, singing and praying were all made use of for the awakening of sinners."³

In John Wesley's preaching, and in his journals, full credence was given to the popular belief in the significance of dreams and other forms of foreknowledge, faith-healing and exorcisms with the aid of charms and spells, practitioners of occult powers, and the general conviction that one lived in a world subject to the intervention of either benevolent divine spirits or malevolent demonic spirits. The credence given to these beliefs were all part of what John Foreman, regarded as the foremost eighteenth century authority on popular customs, roundly condemned, along with "beliefs in ghosts, fairies, and exorcism as the residual rubbish of Roman superstition."⁴

This approach to explaining the wide appeal of Methodism to the English people can be loosely identified as belonging to what is called the "History of Mentalities" movement which is concerned with "the psychological realities underpinning human conceptions of intimate relationships, basic habits of mind, and attitudes towards the elemental passages of life."⁵ From an original preoccupation with the role played by value forming elites in forging the basic ideals of a particular, historical culture, the movement has turned to "the attitudes of ordinary people toward everyday life.... ideas concerning childhood, sexuality, family and death."⁶ The History of Mentality movement finds a close relationship between cultural ideas and their related ways of life, and the specific understanding of the world current in the particular civilization. The concept of Wesleyan Catholicism described in this chapter, in a similar fashion, concentrates on the way in which Methodism appealed to

the common people because it took seriously their fears and uncertainties of living in a world liable to unpredictable natural disasters and unfortunate death. It does find, however, in opposition to modern trends, higher and lower levels of religious consciousness within Wesleyan Catholicism. Furthermore, Wesleyan Catholicism was shaped by a specific, magical view of the world already identified as the residue of Roman Catholicism, a view that was being abandoned by the value forming elites of the age. Ferdinand Braudel's distinction between "political time" orientated toward problems of change, and "social time", modulated by the slower pace of everyday life, and concerned far more with continuity than with change,⁷ is helpful at this point. The Reformation was a political event imposed from above by the Tudor government and interpreted by later historians as a welcome deliverance from an unpopular faith. "The notion that Catholic practice was imposed on a grumbling populace was only the sense that later historians could make of things," says John Sommerville, "the evidence for Catholic survivals being hidden from them."⁸ John Gay adds that although Henry VIII set the process of Reformation in England in motion, "it took a long time for new ideas and ways to percolate to the parish level and even longer for them to gain acceptance. The average parish congregation was by nature conservative and suspicious of change."⁸ Wesleyan Catholicism owed its appeal to the English people to the chord it struck in their naturally conservative religious consciousness.⁹ In connection with this point it is significant that Methodism was strongest in the Catholic North which lay, according to John Gay, north of a line drawn between the Bristol Channel and the Wash, "with a bulge south to include Oxfordshire."¹⁰ It is significant, therefore, that in 1790 the Wesleyan Methodist circuits in the relevant northern counties contained 34,512 members, and the circuits in the southern counties contained

16,805. Of these there were 7,384 in the remote West Country, and 2,580 in the equally remote Isle of Man.¹¹

The concept of Wesleyan Catholicism is of significance for wider cultural history. Patrick Hutton claims that as the civilizing process proceeds so Western man becomes more pressurized to conform in everyday life, more conscious of the sense of accelerating time, and more preoccupied with himself.¹² The rise of evangelical religion in general, and of Wesleyan Catholicism in particular, coincided with the conception of the modern international commercial world, and with the first world war fought between the colonial powers of Western Europe - the Seven Years War of 1756 to 1763.¹³ In the mass revivals of the British Isles and North America that characterized the Evangelical awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the traditional, communal festivals of pre-Reformation Europe and the more modern, Protestant sense of individuality came together. The evangelical appeal to the individual to conform to the evangelical demand for repentance and rebirth in the light of the short time he had to decide his eternal future took place within the environment of mass revival meetings which were, in effect, the older communal religious celebrations. Leigh Schmidt's verdict on the Presbyterian communion seasons is that in many ways they, "paralleled the eucharistic traditions of late medieval Catholicism. Scottish revivalism... had as its most immediate cultural parallel the sacramental festivals and holy days that the early reformers had taken pains to dismantle."¹⁴

2. Wesleyan Catholicism

James Everett said of Wesley: "he was superstitious! - he was; but it was not in the sense [of] hesitating which foot to put over the threshold of the door on a Friday morning. His superstitions were all connected with an invisible state, and he was aware, that one well authenticated tale, respecting apparitions, and what not, would operate powerfully upon the

minds of the uneducated, for whose benefit he chiefly wrote, than a long chain of metaphysical reasoning upon the immateriality and immortality of the human soul."¹⁵ Hence Wesley's tales of divine healings in which God once simultaneously healed Wesley of a severe headache and his horse of lameness, and on other occasions healed various men and women of violent fevers and of the disorders like speechlessness associated with the fevers - all in response to Wesley's prayers.¹⁶ God could also exact retribution on those who opposed His divinely ordained work of the Methodist preachers: the leader of the notorious anti-Methodist mob at Darlaston died of a stroke, a J.P. who discharged rioters with a commendation for their behaviour dropped down dead, an Anglican priest at Todmorden who had preached a violent sermon against the Methodists in his parish was stricken with a violent fit of palsy.¹⁷

Sophisticated friends of Wesley laughed indulgently at his credulity because, like James Boswell, they "admired his various talents and loved his pious zeal."¹⁸ Wesley's naive beliefs however struck a chord in the religious consciousness of a sizeable proportion of the English people which had been muted since the Reformation of the sixteenth century. A chord which was a syncretistic blend of magic and Christianity. Magic was mankind's response to the human consciousness of living in an unpredictable, hazardous natural world subject to an equally unpredictable world of ambivalent divinities and spirits. The basic human problem in this uncertain existence was human security and happiness - not abstract speculation about the meaning of life. Magic was the means employed to promote human happiness and to avert human misery. Roman Christianity's attempts to come to terms with this deep rooted, intractable magical consciousness either through coercion or through assimilation had resulted either in a popular syncretistic blend of Christian ritual and belief with superstitious recourse to magic, or with their mutually reinforcing co-existence.¹⁹

Glimpses of this magical Catholic consciousness within Methodism can be caught in people like the father of Joseph Healey who had been a noted cow-leech and physician at Captain Fold in Lancashire. In 1818 Healey told his companion, Samuel Bamford: "That his father was a devout man of the Methodist persuasion, and a firm believer in witches and witchcraft; which persuasion he also inherited." Whenever his father was called upon to treat sudden and uncommon disorders attributed to "the influences of infernal spirits" he often treated them on the "supernatural plan" which sometimes involved the use of "spells, drugs and herbs prepared at particular seasons, and under certain forms and ceremonials" and at other times "the power of faith, and the efficacy of private prayer."²⁰ Evan Christian, a Manx local preacher of the mid-nineteenth century, "had a strong faith in certain occult natural forces, which he... thought he could to some extent control, and employ for the purpose of physical healing. The people resorted to him in time of accident; and whilst he gave no medicine... wonders were wrought."²¹ Much earlier, Adam Clarke, the great Wesleyan biblical scholar, had dabbled in occult philosophy shortly before and after his conversion in 1775 in his desire to attain the knowledge that would enable him to gain control over supernatural spirits.²²

The common Methodist consciousness of living in a world subject to divine or satanic intervention was the bonding which held together three strands of religious experience. There was the piety of the preacher, the piety of the people in the pews, and the popular piety of the people converted during the revivals. It was the combination, co-existence, and confrontation between these three kinds of religious consciousness which constituted Wesleyan Catholicism.

In addition to striking a chord of superstition in the English religious consciousness Wesley also also tapped a vein of morbid religious consciousness within the English

psyche. Elie Halévy, the French historian, identified this morbid element in 1906 as the Puritan faith which had triumphed at the time of Cromwell's republic and through its "fanatic and grimly zealous" indoctrination had left its imprint on the national consciousness of the English people in the form of a melancholia which led either to suicide or to religious meditation.²³ This Puritan faith was itself the product of a Western guilt culture which emerged between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries according to the modern French scholar Jean Delumeau. His argument is that Western civilization felt itself under siege from a whole host of real and imagined enemies between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries - Turks, idolators, Jews, heretics, witches, and so on. This "siege mentality" was accompanied by "an oppressive feeling of guilt, an unprecedented movement towards introspection, and the development of a new moral conscience." These cultural characteristics of the age were in part the product of the monastic literary ascetic tradition which emphasized the corruption of the world and the need to disown it: "It devalued sexuality, was disgusted by procreation and childbirth, laid heavy stress on miseries and disease, had a strong taste for the macabre, and pronounced the human mind incapable of true knowledge." This elite philosophy gained credibility because its rise coincided with "a series of vast collective disasters that besieged Europeans from the Black Death to the Wars of Religion. The preachers seemed to have good reason to say that mankind was guilty and to foretell punishments in both this life and the next."²⁴ The Puritan faith derived a common set of propositions from this earlier guilt culture regarding: the Christian's greatest enemy in the continuous battle of life was himself; the ills of the world are the punishment of an irate God; the corrupting omnipresence of Satan and his devils dragging mankind down to eternal damnation.²⁵

The morbid Puritan religious consciousness was especially characteristic of the Wesleyan preachers. Wellman J. Warner, the North American scholar, in his analysis of the 220 men listed by William Myles in 1813 as forming the first generation of Methodist Preachers, found that they were drawn from the ranks of the skilled artisans, small tradesmen and small farmers. Detailed examination of sixty of these preachers showed that "practically all of them acquired the basis of an elementary education"; the great majority came from families in which religious interest was strong and "preponderantly Anglican"; and that fifty of them "specifically asserted that childhood was marked by religious distress, intense spiritual hunger and overwhelming fear ... The uncertainty of life bore heavily upon them all... The work of the revival inevitably represented to these men the fulfillment of this well-defined need.." ²⁶ In view of the earlier background of this religious guilt culture the Puritan faith of the Methodist preachers can be called morbid Wesleyan Catholicism.

Unlike the Roman catholic the morbid Wesleyan catholic was left to act out the drama of guilt and repentance, heaven and hell on his own, without the aid of a father-confessor or the emotional support of the church's rituals - especially that of the Cult of the Dead. An endowment, donation or gift could secure for the donors the intercessions of friars, monks and parish priests for the souls of the dead. Their names would be placed on the bede-roll and they would be prayed for from the pulpit or at the celebration of the Mass: "Intercessions" says Robert Whiting, "constituted a crucial element in lay piety on the eve of the Reformation." Fear of evil spirits had been combatted by the popular belief in the spiritual power of church bells - "Ringing preceded services, marked the eve of All Souls, and proclaimed funerals and intercessions" says Whiting. "... and on occasion... they were rung during storms for protection against the forces of evil." ²⁷

Wesleyan revivalism, then, was rooted in the pre-Reformation religious consciousness of the common people starved by the Puritan Reformation of those popular rituals and festivities associated with sacred sites and images which had nourished their need for the intervention of the supernatural and miraculous in their monotonous daily lives ruled by fear of fate and witchcraft.²⁸ Methodist revivalism met this need by exploiting the lurking fear at the heart of popular catholic consciousness through its preaching of the eternal damnation awaiting unrepentant sinners to produce supercharged religious revivals which restored drama and excitement to local community life.

Under such conditions it is not surprising that there were many spurious conversions. Edward Derrington, who worked as a lay city evangelist in Birmingham on behalf of Carr's Lane Congregational Church in the mid- nineteenth century, found "ten backsliders of the Wesleyan denomination to two of all the sects of the Christian Church"; and could only account for this phenomenon by supposing "that they take conviction for conversion."²⁹ This kind of vague understanding of the process of conversion was the consequence of the superficial guidance given to those labouring under the conviction of sin during a revival meeting. During the course of a revival taking place at Guiseley in Yorkshire in 1840 Benjamin Gregory wandered into the schoolroom of the chapel: "where a great number of people knelt beside the ranged benches and beat them furiously.. I listened for the advices of the prayer-leaders to the penitent, but I could hear nothing beyond a continuous heartening of them to an untiring importunity in such words as these: " Stick tul (to); ye'll niver hev a better chance." "³⁰

Considering the noise, excitement, disorder, and agitated physical behaviour associated with Methodist revivalism it is not surprising that a premium was placed upon obtaining a subjective sense of emotional "peace" rather than upon receiving any form of coherent,

rational guidance or instruction. The problem lay in treating conversion as an emotional, heartfelt assent to a set of propositions. In 1829 John Hunt and some fellow Methodists made a special journey from their home at Swinderby to hear John Smith preach at the nearby village of Thorpe. John Smith had a reputation for revivalistic preaching under which people found peace. John Hunt was unmoved by the sermon, but at the after service prayer-meeting some began to cry out for mercy: "Mr. Smith was praying with a poor woman who could not believe in Christ, and Mr. Smith who knew what was needed was praying with all his soul and might, 'Send us more power.' I kneeled near him and remember with some little feeling I said 'Amen.' Immediately a most overwhelming influence came upon me, so that I cried aloud for mercy for the sake of Christ, while I was in a minute as completely bathed with tears and perspiration as if I had been thrown into a river. I prayed in an agony for a few minutes. Mr. Smith came to me, and asked me what I wanted, I answered I want my sins forgiven for the sake of Christ. This was all I know. I had only one thought, and only one way of expressing it, either to God or man. Mr. Smith asked me if I believed God gave his Son for me. I said, 'Yes.' He then asked, 'Do you believe Christ died for you?' I said, 'Yes.' He then brought me to the point and asked, 'Do you believe that God is satisfied with the atonement of His son, and that now for His sake He forgives you?' I could not answer this but cried to God for help, and I was enabled to trust in the sufficient atonement of Christ on my personal account. At that moment I felt the pardoning love of God. I cried out, 'I do save, I do save,' intending to say He does save. Mr. Smith, 'No, its Christ that saves you.' That was what I meant, and what I then proclaimed with a full heart of joy unspeakable and full of glory. I exhorted all to join me in praising the Lord..." It is significant that on his way home when he was in a quieter frame of mind John Hunt "was tempted to believe it was all a delusion until the Apostle's

words were applied to my mind, 'Above all, taking the shield of faith whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked,' which entirely dispelled the temptation."³¹

It is not surprising that many, many people without his religious background and knowledge should have been laughed out of, or talked out of, whatever religious experience they may had once they got back among unsympathetic family, friends and neighbours.

Methodism, therefore, suffered from a constant leakage of members. R.A.Knox writes of Wesley's task of "filling a leaky vessel" due to "the constant and violent leakage in the movement. The figures at Norwich, between the years 1755 and 1764, show the following year-to-year variations: 83, 134, 110, 760, 507, 412, 630, 310, 174. Admittedly they are cited as an extreme case, but the same sort of thing was constantly happening elsewhere. You read of a drop from 2,800 to 2,200 in London, 100 members lost at Bristol, then 450 (half the total), then another 100; of half the society falling away at Liverpool, three-quarters of it at Pembroke; Redruth drops from 300 or 400 to 110, Wigan from 140 to 12..."³² Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Wesleyan Methodism could not hold its members. Frederick Hockin pointed out the catastrophic rate at which Wesleyan Methodism lost its members from the 1880s onwards: "their own published returns reveal the significant facts that their members are leaving the Connexion at the rate of 40,000 per annum. The Minutes of Conference for 1884, whilst stating a net increase of 3,281 confess to a leakage of 43,104. In 1885 the net increase was 2,791 with a leakage of 41,320; whilst in 1886, in spite of 45,230 new members, there is a net decrease of 779, the total number of members in Great Britain being 412,384, and the leakage, allowing for deaths, being 40,634."³³

Between the preachers in the pulpits and the unstable crowds drawn into the churches by revivalism there were the people in the pews. The great majority of these respectable, reliable Wesleyan members were probably religious in the way that John Wesley was at Charterhouse, inasmuch as they "hoped to be saved by..(1) not being so bad as other people; (2) having still a kindness for religion; and (3) reading the Bible, going to church, and saying my prayers."³⁴ The God of the majority of these members and regular adherents was a far more friendly, tolerant God than the Puritanical God of the preachers. They found it hard to come to terms with the degree of self-loathing required of them by the preaching of justification by faith. The eldest cousin of James Prickard - a sober, industrious, sensible young man - died of consumption: "About four days before he died, his father was in the room with him, and heard him burst out into a sudden bewailing of his sins. His father said, 'My dear, you have led a regular, sober life, and there can be no fear for you: if you are not safe, what will become of such a sinner as I, and thousands more?'"³⁵ The father was not alone in finding it hard to come to terms with the preaching of justification by faith alone. Martin Luther once confessed to his own personal difficulty of coming to terms with the experience of justification by faith alone after twenty years of preaching and cultivating the experience: "still I feel the old clinging dirt of wanting to so deal with God that I may contribute something and he will have to give me His grace in exchange for my holiness."³⁶ James Rogers recalled the confusion of his father and his neighbours during one winter evening conversation when: "many queries were proposed about salvation: none of them thought it possible that any certainty could be attained in this life, whether they should be saved at last or not. But the general opinion was, that our actions would all be weighed in the day of judgment; and if our good debts over-balanced our bad ones we would go to heaven; but if the contrary we should go to hell. But some

dissented a little from this, and thought, Nay, but God was merciful and sent His Son to die for sinners; and that their best way would be to amend their lives, and do all they could, and Christ would make up the rest."³⁷ Joseph Scott was one Wesleyan who "always spoke of himself as having been drawn by love, rather than driven by terror. He was not a subject of those distressing convictions which many penitent sinners are made to feel in their entrance on the christian life; and this to him was a source of frequent temptation almost to the last. Often he has said, 'Satan wants to persuade me I was never truly converted.' He would then add 'This I know, I feel that I love God: I love his people; and I love his ways. I love and pray for all mankind; and I say, 'Lord, if I am not right, do thou make me right': and he answers my prayer, and sheds abroad his love in my heart.'"³⁸

For people with this kind of concept of a tolerant, fatherly kind of God death was more of a misfortune to be accepted fatalistically rather a fearful gateway to a destiny of either eternal bliss or torment. On October 10, 1755 Thomas Illingworth, a schoolteacher and Methodist class-leader in the neighbourhood of Silsden in Yorkshire, was told by a young, female member of his class, of a young man who had been dragged to his death after accidentally falling off his horse and trapping his foot in a stirrup: "After she'd related the story she said, Misfortunes would happen. I said, Death was not always misfortune. She said, No, she hoped it was not to him. I asked her what reason she had to hope so. Well, she said, he was a quiet lad. I said that was only a natural qualification. Did she ever hear that he was converted? She said, Nay, she did not think he was. I said what would she say, if he was not converted he was surely in Hell as the devil was. Some of them seemed astonished, but after reasoning a little with them they had nothing to say against it."³⁹ Part of the function of revivalism was to awaken such people to their fearful danger of damnation. Margaret Adams, a respectable farm girl, at a Bible Christian love-feast "fell

to the ground... I saw hell open to receive me, and nothing but the mercy of God, and the thread of life kept me from falling in."⁴⁰ The obituary columns of the *Arminian*, *Methodist*, and *Wesleyan Magazines* bear testimony to those who conformed to the experience demanded of them - but the great majority must have remained formal, middle-of-the-way religious people strenuously opposed to the revivalism generated by the preachers from the pulpit, and the prayer-leaders in the pews.

Then there was the numerous body of good people living decent lives with unsatisfied religious aspirations who found a more congenial home within the spontaneous worship and warm fellowship of Methodism. People like Francis Asbury at Wednesbury in 1759 who "soon found this was not the Church - but it was better. The people were so devout - men and women kneeling down and saying 'Amen'. Now, behold! they were singing hymns - sweet sound! Why, strange to tell! the preacher had no prayer-book, and yet he prayed wonderfully! What was yet more extraordinary the man took his text and had no sermon book; thought I, this is wonderful! It is certainly a strange way, but the best way."⁴¹ Henry Longden had a similar experience on his first visit to Mulberry Street Chapel, Sheffield in 1776: There, too, the people were devout and the sermon was extempore. The people sang "with all their hearts" and wept in sympathy with the preacher "who felt what he said, and could not restrain tears from running down his cheeks.." Longden found the worship to be "pure, simple, and spiritual" and the people "primitive and apostolic."⁴² Charles Champness was a native of the East End of London, and a devout Anglican. In 1834 he migrated to Manchester in search of work as a blockprinter. He found lodgings at Stockport with a Betty Lee who was a Methodist. She invited him to attend the local Methodist chapel where he was 'awakened' under the preaching of George Osborn. He found a congenial spiritual home in All Saints Church, Manchester; but the preacher turned

out to be a supply for the resident Rector who was of little help; so Charles Champness turned to the Grosvenor Street Wesleyan Chapel. "No one can tell how much we, as a family, owe to the social element in Methodism," wrote his distinguished son, Thomas Champness. "Betty Lee made father feel that before he left Stockport, and when once he got among the dear people at Grosvenor Street he found things very different from All Saints Church. There he had gone in and out, and no one had said a word to him except from the pulpit; but in the Wesleyan Chapel he found kind friends ready to ask after his welfare and to invite him to the class-meeting."⁴³

3. The decline of Wesleyan Catholicism

John Walsh calls the recruitment of Methodist members from those favourably inclined towards churchgoing and church membership, "lateral" growth; and recruitment from the ranks of the non-churchgoing, "frontal" growth. He says: "The rise of Methodism owed much to its ability not only to create religious zeal where none existed, but to recharge and articulate existing cells of piety. Its growth was not only frontal - by recruitment from the unchurched, but lateral - from committed church members, Anglican and Nonconformist."⁴⁴ George Smith, who as befitted a Cornishman, was a great champion of frontal growth through the instrumentality of revivals, did not have a high opinion of the membership potential of people with established religious backgrounds. "After much experience in the working of Methodism, and in many revivals",⁴⁵ he had no hesitation in declaring his "full belief that a larger proportion of persons brought into Society in revivals, when properly cared for, continue members to the end of their lives, than of those who join it in the ordinary way... because in our judgment, a larger proportion of them are truly converted."⁴⁶ A random survey of the thirty-three people mentioned by name in the Methodist magazines for 1794 and 1801 does not support Smith's claim. It was only people

who proved their worth as loyal and devoted members of the Wesleyan Church who were counted worthy of a mention in the connexional magazine. Seven had been devout Anglicans before becoming Methodists; one was the son of Dissenting parents; seven had an unspecified devout religious background; four were decent, respectable people before becoming members; nine came from Methodist families; and of the remaining five two were converted under field preaching, two were invited to attend Methodist meetings, and only one is mentioned as being won for Methodism through a revival - Anne Jackson who was converted during a revival at Newton, Yorkshire, when she was aged eleven years. It was these people drawn from the existing religious sub-culture who were prepared to shoulder the financial burden of being Methodist members, and who provided the stable nucleus of committed members around which those drawn into the connexion by means of frontal growth could coalesce and consolidate. Smith's proviso "when properly cared for" undermined his claim because it was only those with a conventional religious background who were capable of providing the informed leadership and guidance needed by the converts of revivalism.

The Methodist class-meeting failed to meet the needs of the average member and adherent. Any form of catholicism needs a strong core of spiritually elite members to preserve the purity of Christian faith and practice in a system of church life and polity which encourages syncretistic beliefs and practices. The class-meeting failed to achieve this objective. It foundered on the average member's failure to come to terms with the stereotyped Methodist interpretation of Christian spirituality.

The class-meeting had begun to lose whatever attraction it had initially possessed by the beginning of the nineteenth century so that people attended them reluctantly, "urged on by a sense of duty, rather than drawn by a feeling of interest".⁴⁷ William Leach, in 1829,

found evidence for people attending class-meetings "merely out of custom" in the growing tendency for some persons to meet in class on Sundays "when they could, with scarcely any inconvenience, meet on a week-day. They will attend a Prayer-meeting, hear two or three sermons, and meet their class on the Sabbath-day; and probably never come near any place of public worship during the remaining six days of the week. Has not this at least the appearance of formality? As if they thought it enough to dispatch all their religious concerns on the Sabbath. Would it not be better for thousands, who could easily do it, to attend to their Class-meeting on a week-day?"⁴⁸

The following kinds of objections were raised by those who were the object of William Leach's scorn: the prior claims of secular business, the restless character of social life, the competition of alternative, more attractive kinds of religious meetings, and a fastidious, self-conscious distaste "to speaking freely of the deepest thoughts and feelings."⁴⁹

The distaste of the average members and adherents who were willing to contribute to Methodist funds by paying a pew rent but not to subject themselves to the vulgar intimate confessional of the class-meeting, together with the irregular or non-attendance of those members who were bored with the stultifying formalism of the class-meeting, only exacerbated what John Bowmer called "the perennial question.. of the relationship of Society membership by ticket and membership in the Church of Christ by Baptism and Confirmation."⁵⁰ Men like Leach tended to identify membership of the Methodist Society with the membership of the Christian church for he said scornfully of those adherents who refused to meet in class: "Some ask, when closely exhorted and warned, 'Can we not go to heaven without being in Society?' That is, Can we not go to heaven without being members of the church on earth?" The use of such unguarded language gave the impression that the possession of a Methodist class ticket was a virtual passport to heaven which many

adherents and increasing numbers of children of Methodist parents refused to accept so that Leach was driven to exclaim: "O how many of the children of Methodist parents are sinning against the clearest light and conviction! They know they ought to give themselves to God, after the example of their parents; but they do not."⁵¹ Instead they joined the Church of England. In 1877 J.H.Rigg admitted that "It is not an uncommon complaint of Methodists to-day that their children, when they grow up, migrate to the Church of England."⁵²

The drift of these children who had been baptised and were thus members of the Church of Christ but denied from taking the Sacrament of The Lord's Supper in the Methodist Church because they did not possess a class ticket may have led to the relaxing of the Methodist Discipline for a writer in the October issue of the London Quarterly for 1875 stated forcefully - but, I suspect inaccurately - that: "Never has the position and standing of a baptized person been dishonoured by either the Methodist constitution or its administration. Never has the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper been denied to a single soul because the ticket of membership in the class was not produced."⁵³ The membership of the Church of Christ was brought into harmony with the membership of the Methodist Society in 1889 when Conference decided that regular attendance at the class-meeting was no longer a condition for membership of the Methodist Church.⁵⁴

The relaxation of the demands of Methodist membership was an acknowledgement that the normal life of Methodist Societies had become more diverse through being centred upon the general congregation making full use of the church premises rather than upon a spiritual elite meeting in the exclusive fellowship of the Class. In the same year in which the Wesleyan Conference took the decision to relax the rule about membership being dependent upon attendance at the class-meeting, William Unsworth produced a book called

The Aggressive Character of Christianity in which the comprehensive fellowship of the class-meeting catering for the spiritual development of the members according to Wesley's teaching on Christian Perfection was replaced by a whole host of specialised agencies catering for all a manner and conditions of men. Unsworth recommended: revival missions for children, all manner of "improvement" meetings for young men and young women, cottage-meetings for the poor and drawing-room meetings for the rich, all manner of benevolent institutions to provide charity for the poor, and special services outside the normal church times for people who worked irregular hours.⁵⁵

Methodism had ceased to be a religious revival movement and was seeking to be a national church catering for a wide variety of human needs and interests. Methodists would increasingly derive their pleasure and excitement from the amounts of money that could be raised for the chapel funds at Sunday-school Anniversaries, bazaars, and other special efforts. Norfolk Street Chapel, Sheffield marked its centenary in 1880 by aiming to raise the £2,650 needed to clear the debt upon the building. At the public meeting held to celebrate the Centenary it was announced that a bazaar had raised £700, a concert had produced £20, and £865 realized by subscriptions and collections. At this stage Morley Punshon presumed upon his popularity with the audience to bring a touch of humour and playful drama to the proceedings by announcing that he had had the chapel doors locked to prevent anyone from leaving the chapel until the remaining £65 of outstanding debt had been cleared. The outrageous ploy succeeded. At Morley Punshon's suggestion " the crowded and delighted congregation rose and sang the doxology ,and, with the benediction, the long-to-be remembered meeting closed."⁵⁶ There was similar excitement and drama at the opening of the new Sunday-school building at the Wesleyan Chapel, Hednesford on June 18, 1883. A thousand people turned up for the afternoon service but 1250 people

swamped the tea-meeting that followed. The climax of the evening meeting was reached when A. Baker rose to address the congregation on its duty to fulfil the primary purpose of the meeting which was to raise the money needed to pay for the new building: "He thought he had done his share, but if £100 could be raised that night he would give £5 towards it, and turning to the chairman and the speakers he appealed to them to say what they would contribute. The chairman promised a similar amount as also did several other individuals. The remainder of the evening was occupied in handing round and collecting slips of paper stating the names of persons and the amounts they would contribute. In this way were collected or promised over £70 bringing up the day's proceedings to about £150. There were the usual votes of thanks and responses, and the meeting closed about 9.30 being the most enthusiastic and most successful ever held at Hednesford in the history of Methodism."⁵⁷

W.S. Allen, the M.P. for Newcastle-under-Lyme, expressed the disquiet of the revivalist wing of Wesleyan Methodism at this development within the church when he wrote, "Our church is rich in gold and silver, but is there not a danger we should become poor in spiritual power? Our organization is singularly perfect, but is there not some risk, that its very completeness should fetter and cripple us by routine and form? Saving souls should be our great business; but is there not far more thought bestowed on money and collections? Every week the pages of our newspapers contain several columns devoted to accounts of opening services, and chapel sermons, and anniversary sermons, and we are told that the discourses were able, and powerful, and exhaustive, and the collections unusually large; but how seldom do these columns contain the announcement, that so many souls were converted under the sermon, and that at the prayer meeting so many penitents came up to the penitent form, and so many poor sinners found pardon..⁵⁸

This deliquescence of Wesleyan catholicism was due, in part, to the process of secularisation begun by the French Revolution which had shifted "the traditional reading of humanity as fallen and struggling to serve God, in favour of a more optimistic view of human capacity and ideal of the pursuit of happiness."⁵⁹ The Theory of Evolution reinforced this process by reinterpreting history as a progressive upward trend. The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine for 1890 stated, "Progress is the law of life and of health.. The Bible speaks much of this law of Progress.. The Methodist Church is, in spirit, progressive." As Robert Currie points out, "This idea of progress meant elimination of dogma and creed."⁶⁰ But it was, ironically, a change of emphasis in doctrine from that of Soteriology to that of Christology - from "Jesus as man rather than Lamb, on religion as a guide to living, as well as a passport to Paradise"⁶¹ - which enabled "A much looser, vaguer more palatable Christianity" to replace the increasingly unpalatable evangelical doctrines of eternal and vicarious punishment, a Christianity in which "God was not ruler and judge but loving father. The universe was progressive and dynamic, informed by a divine evolutionary benevolence. Christ was no longer the immediate and overwhelming demonstration of divine omnipotence and justice in human life. He was, instead, rather like a popular minister of religion, smiling but grave, enormously learned, wise and experienced, but full of help, understanding, generosity, and fun. He was still infinitely superior to ordinary men, but he showed he was one of us..⁶²

4. Conclusion

The general Methodist belief of living in a world exposed to the agencies of beneficent and malign supernatural agencies provided a common meeting ground with the residue of Roman Catholicism within the popular religious consciousness prone to superstitious fear of witchcraft, fearful of the unpredictable, and terrified of the prospect of eternal damnation.

The human libido aroused to extremes of excitement by the stresses and strains of external circumstances could uninhibitedly express itself within the mass hysteria of popular revivalism. Wesleyan Catholicism, like Roman Catholicism, was not democratic. The hierarchy of authoritarian supervision and discipline of the spiritual life of its believers designed to produce a hard core of spiritually elite priests and laity on which falls the burden of preserving the essential nature of Christian faith and sanctity in Roman Catholicism, had its counterpart in Wesleyan Catholicism in the supreme authority of the superintendent minister deriving his authority from the absolute power of a Conference composed exclusively of ministers, and in the obligation of all Wesleyan members to attend the class-meeting designed to promote an elite Wesleyan spiritual sanctity based upon the four stages of the Scriptural Plan of Salvation as interpreted and expounded by John Wesley. Wesleyan Catholicism gradually fell a victim to the revolutionary cultural changes introduced by the Wars against France. Democracy and belief in the progressive individual improvement of mankind combined to render the uniform Wesleyan experience of salvation as programmed by John Wesley obsolescent, and with it the spiritual authority of the ministers and the spiritual discipline of the class meeting. In 1878 lay representatives were admitted to the Wesleyan Conference. In 1889 attendance at the class-meeting was no longer considered as mandatory for being a member. In 1894 the production of a Form of Service for the Public Recognition New Members was an acknowledgement that the normal life of Wesleyan churches had become more diverse and was now centred upon the congregation making full use of the church premises than upon a spiritual elite meeting in the exclusive fellowship of the class. What survived was the genial, moderate religious consciousness of the majority of the respectable people in the pews who came to look to

God the Good Shepherd for benevolent, providential shepherding through the uncertainties of life, and who sought to be a compassionate Good Samaritan to one's neighbours.

The result of secularization - making religion only a part of culture rather than integral with it - is to make religious belief more self-conscious, "and as religion becomes more self-conscious there arises the possibility of actual unbelief."⁶² This process can be glimpsed in the religious experience of individuals on the Chase. George Ashton, a member of the New Connexion chapel at Cheslyn Hay, was killed by a sudden roof-fall on January 20 1849 while working down one of the many small local pits. He was carried home on the door of a house, as was the custom. His friend, William Jones, who lived on to become the oldest member of the chapel, was moved to write a poem about the incident. The religious meaning of life, and the importance of faith was brought out in the concluding verse:

From this we may a lesson learn,

That man must to the death return

Then let us all prepare to die,

That we may live with Christ on high.

Cornelius Whitehouse, the edge tool manufacturer, was of the next generation of Methodists at Cheslyn Hay. He was a gifted musician and hymn writer. One of his hymns reflects the element of self-conscious doubt creeping into the popular religious consciousness as he contemplated death:

My faithless sight sees ghostly visions.

Fears of spectral dawn encompass me.

Father take my hand and from the night

lead up to the light.

Endnotes

- 1.C.D.Field, "The social composition of English Methodism to 1830: a membership analysis." *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, Volume 76, No.1, Spring 1994, 67. Methodism tended to be more female in its composition than the adult population as a whole - 57.7% of a sample of 80,361 members drawn from 108 membership lists compared to 52.3% of the adult population aged 15 and above in the 1821 census. Females were in the majority of those Methodists who were single (61.9%), married (51.2%) and widowed (75.9%). These percentages were significantly higher than the national means for single women (50.3%) and Widows (66.5%).
- 2.H.B.Kendall, *The Origin and History of The Primitive Methodist Church*, Volume I (n.d.), 147
- 3.T.Jackson, *Early Methodist Preachers*, Volume V (1865), 49-50
- 4.P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People. England 1727-1783* (1989), 28
- 5.P.Hutton, "The History of Mentalities:The New Map of Cultural History" , *History and Theory*, Volume XX (1981), 237
6. *ibid.*, 238 (and see P.Spierenburg, *The Broken Spell. A Cultural and Anthropological History of Preindustrial Europe* (Rutgers, 1991) for a text book treatment of the subject along these lines)
- 7.F.Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Volume 1 (1981), 20-21
8. C.J.Somerville, *The Secularization of Early Modern England . From religious culture to religious faith* (1992), 63. See also on the same point: R.Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People. Popular Religion and the English Reformation* (1989) & E.Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars. Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (1989)
- 9.J.D.Gay, *The Geography of Religion in England* (1971), 81
10. *ibid.*, 83
- 11.Davies, George, & Rupp, *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Volume 4 (1988), 235
- 12.Hutton, "History of mentalities..", 258-259
- 14.H.S.Stout, "George Whitefield in Three Countries" in Noll, Bebbington & Rawlyk, *Evangelicalism. Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, The British Isles, and Beyond 1700-1990*, 59 (and books cited in note 3 on page 70)
- 14.L.E.Schmidt, *Holy Fairs. Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton, 1989),20
- 15.J.Everett, *Wesleyan Takings: Or Centenary Sketches of Ministerial Character*, Volume 2 (1851), 11-12
- 16..J.Telford, editor, *The Letters of John Wesley*, Volume I (1931), 344
17. *ibid.*, 345
18. M.Morris, editor, *Boswell's Life of Johnson* (1899), 509
19. This evolution described by Valerie Flint in *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (1989)
20. S.Bamford, *Passages in the Life of A Radical* (1884 reprint 1984), 42
21. *Methodist Recorder* Winter Number 1896, 26
22. J.W.Etheridge, *The Life of the Rev. Adam Clarke, LL.D.* (1859), 28
- 23.E.Haŕlévy, *The Birth of Methodism in England* (Chicago, 1971), 38-39
24. J.Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of A Western Guilt Culture 13th-18th Centuries* (English version 1990), 556-557
- 25.This explanation is preferable to the one offered by Christopher Hill: "The triumph of mechanical philosophy created further problems for Christianity.... Witches, malignant spirits and the devil had been useful explanations for the existence of evil and suffering, useful scapegoats. Who was to blame if they were not? 'Deny spirits and you are an atheist,' divines said. Since God could not be dispensed with, the feelings of sin and guilt previously purged by punishing heretics and witches were increasingly turned inward. The Puritan sense of guilt was part of the price paid for the gap between ideology and technology." C.Hill. *The World Turned Upside Down* (1984), 296 The Witchcraft Act was not repealed until 1736 , and the Marxist theory that human consciousness is shaped by the means of production , in this case, implies a degree of industrial and intellectual sophistication as yet lacking among the majority of people in post-Reformation England.
- 26.W.J.Warner, *The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution* (1930), 256-257
27. Robert Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion and the English Reformation* (1991), 22-23
- 28.The people compensated by turning their "emotional calendar" based on the Church's ritual calendar of saint's days and the great annual festivals of the Church- which "concentrated events into months of light demand upon labour, from the winter to the spring, from Christmas to Easter" - into secular celebrations

- based on the agrarian year , where "the weight of the emotional festive calendar fell in the weeks immediately after the harvest was gathered in" when people had money in their pockets to spend on the attractions offered by "the publicans, hucksters and entertainers." E.P.Thompson, "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture" in *Journal of Social History* (1974), 392-394 The absence of crucifix, priests, nuns, and the images of virgin and saints appear to symbolise a spiritual vacuum which the Reformed Church of England could not fill.
- 29.G.Robson, "The Failures of Success: Working Class Evangelists in Early Victorian Birmingham" in *Studies in Church History* 15 (1978), 387
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CONCLUSION

This study has identified the fundamental problem of Methodism to be the concepts of ministry and church growth formulated by Methodism, and the influence they had upon how Methodists approached the task of spreading their faith. Self-determination became the criteria of growth. These criteria were provided by John Wesley in 1768. Wesley looked for Methodist revival to be the product of: (1) Plain, pointed, emotionally charged, extempore scriptural preaching of the vital necessity of Christian holiness for salvation implemented by fervent prayers for the conversion of the hearers. (2) The rigorous observance of the Methodist pattern of public religious services - especially field preaching, the 5 a.m. preaching service, the fervent singing of hymns, and the diligent observation of both the Friday and quarterly fast days. (3) The core of "believers in any place" meeting in bands for intimate fellowship where they could "speak without reserve." (4) Regular religious instruction from house to house, spending "an hour a week with the children in every large town," and the dissemination of Methodist literature. (5) By being "conscientiously exact in the Methodist discipline" - especially in the regular appointment of new society stewards who were responsible for distributing charity to the poor and needy. (6) Continued union with the Church of England.

These criteria were a synthesis of two different kinds of revival: High Church revival based on a settled, extended pastoral ministry within a parish, and charismatic revival based on an itinerant evangelistic ministry within a circuit system. The growth of Methodism into a national movement forced the synthesis upon Wesley and created tensions within the ranks of the Methodist ministry that were never resolved. In the well established areas of Methodism there was a gradual change in the original character of Methodism from "a great agency for the conversion of souls" into a quasi-national church seeking to be

everything to everyone. The Wesleyan Preachers were forced into changing their role as hardy, mobile evangelists into being administrators and pastors ministering to respectable urban congregations, a change they tried to hide from themselves by still clinging to the circuit system and the principle of an itinerant ministry which effectively stifled their ambitions to be a church and ministry on the Anglican pattern! The task of evangelism passed into the hands of specialist, itinerant, connexional home missionaries and revivalists. This development can be seen taking place on the Chase with the advent of Primitive Methodism in 1836 which introduced the classic pattern of a hardy, mobile, itinerant full time ministry. By 1880 the Wesleyans had also made the Chase a base for their itinerant ministry but the years following 1880 saw both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists placing more and more reliance upon the services of specialist revivalists as both sets of ministers became immersed in the task of administration.

Itinerant, cottage based, lay ministries based on prayer-meetings were features of the growth of all branches of Methodism on the Chase between 1776 and 1836. These ministries required another set of criteria for self-determination. In order to survive, the voluntary associations which met in the cottages and formed the Methodist classes and societies, which were synonymous bodies in most cases because of the relatively few people involved, needed to be: (1) self-sufficient - providing their own local leadership; (2) inclusive - open to all manner of men, women, and children; (3) zealous for the conversion of their neighbours; (4) unrestrained in the emotional expression of their religious fellowship; (5) convinced of living in a world exposed to the agencies of beneficent and malign supernatural agencies (6) independent of the public worship of the local parish church and the pastoral supervision of the local parish priest; (7) committed enough to their religious experience to withstand whatever opposition they had to face from hostile parties.

These criteria express the development of a "frontier mentality" marked by personal enterprise, hardihood, aggressiveness, restlessness, uncertainty and insecurity created by the global industrial, capitalist based, consumer society that began to emerge from the mid-eighteenth century onwards.

Methodist revivalism was the conservative expression of the pre-industrial, catholic religious consciousness of England towards the stresses and strains of the modern industrial society that was emerging in undeveloped regions where the new industrial communities were created. Cannock Chase was such a backward, undeveloped region. Ancient, established communities like Cannock, Penkridge and Rugeley developed industrial "suburbs". Remote hamlets like Brownhills, Burntwood, and Hednesford became thriving "boom" towns. New communities were created at places like Chasetown, Chase Terrace and Wimblebury. The "frontier mentality" was continually reinforced by streams of migrants from the surrounding countryside and from industrial areas in decline like the Shropshire and Black Country coalfields. The patronage and deference of the established order of society was transferred from the gentry to the new breed of successful industrial entrepreneurs who ran the coal and iron industries established on the Chase. In times of rapid social change exacerbated by national and local political and economic crises it appears that people instinctively cling to social and emotional structures that are familiar and proven. The general Methodist belief of living in a world exposed to the agencies of beneficent and malign supernatural agencies provided a common meeting ground with the popular religious consciousness prone to superstitious fear of witchcraft, fearful of the unpredictable, and terrified of the prospect of eternal damnation. The human libido aroused to extremes of excitement by the stresses and strains of external circumstances could uninhibitedly express itself within the mass hysteria of popular revivalism.

Thus field-preaching and cottage prayer-meetings were features of the growth of all branches of Methodism on the Chase between 1776 and 1879. The years between 1880 and 1893 were not only the years when the mining industry assumed the mature structure it would possess until its gradual demise in the 1960s and 1970s but also the years when Methodism consolidated its presence on the Chase. Years that were marked by a steady succession of revivals involving not only Methodism but the Anglican and Nonconformist bodies as well. The religious experience of the skilled artisans and small tradesmen which composed the spiritual elite of Methodism gathered together in the class meeting also underwent a gradual transformation between 1776 and 1893 as hell lost its terrors and holiness consequently lost its way as the royal road to heaven. Evangelical fervour was replaced by fund raising excitement, and the amount of money on the collection plate created a greater sense of achievement than the number of souls converted in a revival meeting.

This study has made three distinctive contributions to the study of the growth of Methodism. It has provided a detailed analysis of John Wesley's concepts of revivalism as they evolved between 1738 and 1768; it has identified and traced the various strands that were woven together between 1738 and 1874 to make up the cord of Methodist revivalism; and it has provided an account of the role of revivalism in promoting the growth of Methodism between 1776 and 1893 on the industrial frontier region of Cannock Chase which has hitherto been neglected by historians. This study can also be considered as being complementary to Margaret Batty's thesis on "Stages in the development and control of Wesleyan Lay Leadership 1791-1878" in the sense that both deal with the decline of lay participation in promoting the growth and vitality of the life of Methodism as the administrative authority of the Itinerant Ministry increased. The sophisticated, respectable

urban class Methodists must share the blame with the ministry they nurtured and cultivated for they failed to realize that praying revivalism with its emotional and vocal exuberance was a genuine democratic movement which gave voice to the meanest and the lowest. F.W.Hackwood has a rather condescending anecdote in one of his books about an old, quaint, workingman who sat in the Wesleyan circuit church at Wednesbury and would shout out "Glory!" at whatever stirred his approval in the service. That old man had once been the glory of Methodism.

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